THE Hudson REVIEW

JOHN SIMON:
The Word on Film

LAURENCE LIEBERMAN:
Joren: The Volcanic Falls—a long poem

HOWARD MOSS:
Three Sisters

MARVIN MUDRICK:
Adorable Ideas and Absent Plenitudes

JOHN GARDNER:
Stillness—a story

Poems by JOYCE CAROL OATES, SAMUEL HAZO, CHARLES TOMLINSON, JOHN FANDEL.

Poetry Chronicle by VERNON YOUNG.

Reviews by GILBERTO PEREZ, ROGER SALE, WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD, GERALD WEALES.

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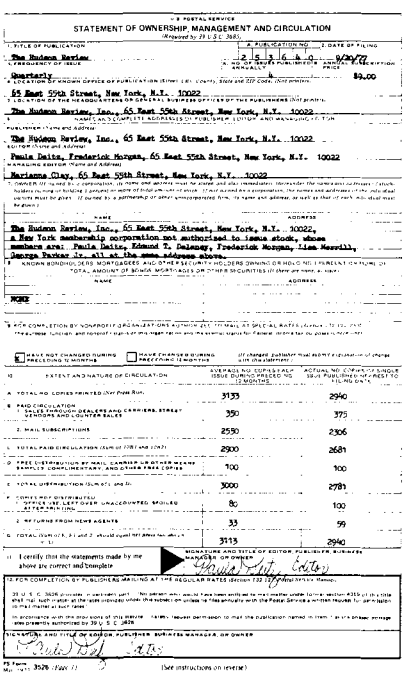

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Letter to the Editors

Dear Editors,

In my essay, "Reflections on Versailles," the meaning of one line was partly obscured by a typographical error. The line is: "In Phèdre's question, 'Where can I hide?'—a question reflected in her feat of naming names . . . etc." "Feat" should read "fear."

FREDERICK BROWN

New York, New York

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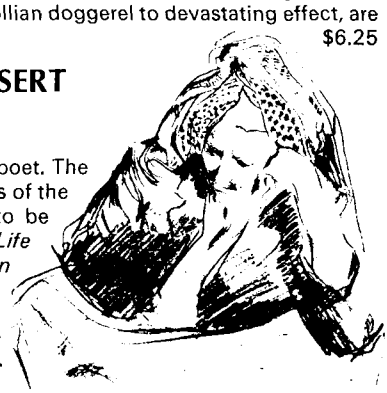

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LAURENCE LIEBERMAN

Joren: The Volcanic Falls

(Izu Peninsula, Japan, 1972)

1. THE DETOUR

No time to ride the tram-car up the precipice
overlooking Shimoda Bay,
where Commodore Perry flew the first U. S. Consular
flag in Japan . . . No time
to read fine print under rocks and sculptures
in the Museum of Phalluses,
erotica
masqueraded as art and geological prodigies . . .
We mill around
a far-flung central bus stop, junction of bus lines
to all points
of the heart-shaped peninsula,
North, East or West: a sprawling bus-switchboard
with dozens of outdoors terminals; behind each,
line-ups of waiting passengers.
After mistakenly filing in three long rows,
we connect. *Coast Highway closed.*

We shall detour North up Mt. Amagi, cross Mt.
Amagi Pass, then transfer
back to sea-
side . . . . Cruising slowly across the long low valley stretch
inland from coast
to foothills, we speed up, capriciously, on the first uphill
curves.
Wheel-ruts and chuck-holes
roughen. The driver, rural kinsman to manic
Tokyo cab jockeys, edges closer and closer
to the road's Continental-left side,
which vanishes beneath us.
I leer dizzily
from the left-rear window, hiding
my winces from the children. How do we find room
to dodge the occasional
motorist
bearing down on us from above with no warning on curves?

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No shoulder.
The moldering
road-edge borders the cliff.
What prevents our wheels
from sinking,
plunging us into the gorge?
How is it the driver's bold fast moves

negotiate the gravel-run's ducks and swoops.
I can see a direct plumbline
down the precipitous overhang—we are flying!
Bite down hard and hard
on my fear open me to the exact beauties
of the live flowing valley
rippling
and shimmering a river of grasses and leaves and tree-tops
flying below spilling
into a long iridescent tunnel of our going fanning out
behind us
streaming away . . . We loop
a grand circling mountain dance a spiralling
upsweep:
bus road cliff valley—
revolving
and careening all together: no swerves!
The whole valley breathes our heaving and swaying
course—our moves the mountain's breath . . . .

Swoosh!
The bus lurches right, bucks,
taking a high bounce,
rear wheels
upraised for a full three seconds.
My sucked-in breath
explodes, the killed road
rematerializing beneath our axles. Now we are riding
flat and level.
A conspicuous sign flashes
our altitude in meters: the last rise
we floated across is the peninsular apogee—
Mt. Amagi Pass!
We coast,
skirting a ridge suspended over a double-crater
valley, so densely wooded
I can barely make out in silhouette the family
of extinct volcanoes that lived
and died here.

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These defunct craters spawn teeming legions of forests,
mammoth ferns, high grasses,
wildflowers . . .
The road, narrow ribbon nestled between two
rows of hills,
bears a sharp uphill left.
We halt. *Dogashima junction.* The bus empties.

2. THE DESCENT

Three hours stopover. Last bus to West Coast.
Shall we risk the long hike down
the steep earth-crevasse to Joren Waterfall?
We stroll to the edge of the ravine,
hover on the upper lip of a downhill trail,
a serpentining pathway.
Voices
approach from below.
Three slender figures in kimonos—
two women and a man—
emerge, advancing slowly in a zigzag course up the sheer
incline;
one woman, trailing
the others by a short gap, braces each second
step with a bamboo cane.
She jerks to a stop.
Eyes shut, hand cupped over her nose,
she whiffs immense slow breaths—in alternate
snorts—through each nostril, drawing

silent vast power from the atmosphere. *To breathe*
is the art . . .
How far down
are the falls,
we ask? One hour, the man replies, bowing from the waist.
We all bow and bow . . . .
Warning the children to follow—not lead!—we descend.
I test
each step, noting the irregular
pattern of man-made stone shelves, terraced
ridges, notched and indented in the rock.
I mark the slipperiness of gravel,
the skid-risk of oblique slopes—stooping,
my knees close to earth, I stalk,
grasping rock-knuckles, tree-limbs jutting
over the path, or latticework
intertwining

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vines and lovely flowering shrubs.
Two rabbits scurry
underfoot. I trip over one,
trying to snatch the other. Debra spots a fawn, leaping
from a cliff
overhead, its white furry tail
vanishing into a small cave-mouth. At last,

we take turns passing each other on the narrow
single-file path. A wind
I hardly noticed (fanning gently my left cheek)
shifts and gusts, shoving me
from behind!
How does wind velocity build
in this gulf, fissure,
deep earth-
rent, gouge, rock-enclosed mountain crevasse?
I retard
my steps to a halt too fast,
lean back on my heels, and crouch to keep from falling.
The children
speed up, their heads
and backs rolling in a downward spiral
below my legs disappearing reappearing
around bends. *Such grace and poise*
in the rhythmic sweep of wind-lashed limbs!
Beautiful, their absent pitching

of hips and calves! How lovely the mindless
unmindful dance I missed,
too self-
bewitched, caught up in my own dream-gliding trance.
Surefooted, they caper
and sprint as small animal paws—all weightless ease—
scuttle.
In my long ten second
lapse space! space! so much free wideopen
floating invisible being
Oh how I listen!
I can hear my underfoot heel-
tapping and small branch crackling die out.
The wind-whine, tickling my neck,
quietens, dissolves into a bass two-octave-lower
sigh-absorbing rumble, ahead
and below:
a distant gurgle too evenly dinning to be surf washing ashore,
a sound of water

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flying in wide slender sheets, water caught and wailing
as it spreads
into a tower of falling churn—
suds, lather and froth—diffusing to spray

at the misty perimeters: the falls, the falls!
We draw near to the chasm floor.
I pursue the runaway children—lunging,
I stumble into a soft gravel bed
at the foot of the winding path, half-tripping
into a wide oval pool
of dark blue
water, so shatteringly clear I can see a few sparkly bits
rotating at depths
of fifty to a hundred feet: a crater pool—or bottomless
abyss?—
many times deeper
than wide, deeper than the distance around,
deeper than the steep high whirling wall
of water that empties into its mouth,
tons of wetness plunging from the canyon
roof, hurtling its body of mountain-top

apocalypse—a sky-fire-keen howl of downgush!—
into the serene instant-calm
of the rippleless
level poolface: the silvery raging belt of churned-up foam
tearing itself apart, wetness
shattering, ripping itself inside out, eating its heart
out to become
scud—weightless, bodiless—
to fight free of the bonds of mass, gulping
air-pockets in mouthfuls, feeding on substanceless
ether, absorbing more and more
of the floating sun-laced life of bubbles; swindled
by the mountain's lie, the summit's
promise of harvest into airborne vapors, a reward
for falling, falling, falling
to its cease,
exhausting itself in a mighty impact on the pool's stony face . . .
Distrust the lure
of innocent leaps, bounds, hurdles. Fear the trigger-impulse
of the child
within, of the child in all.
Where are the children? Have *they* been whisked,

resistlessly, into the drink?

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I cry out, stunned.
The girls—their voices muffled trills—
answer.
They are entombed, locked in the wall
to my left, the gay replies muted,
filtered through thicknesses of volcanic quartz.
Echoing resonances. I leap
across bulrush
to the wall, start to claw the children free from a cliff-grave
with shredding fingernails.
Can their small bodies fit around this bare smooth rock-surface,
slightly arched—
I ponder, tracking with my palms?
The ledge at my feet answers. Two short zigzag
steps across the lip of a shallow cave
glide me into a high long cavern.
I follow the pool-edge trail, a narrow
overhanging ridge, and join the girls—

transfixed by a view beside the falls. Squinting,
I make out dim outlines. *Take*
two steps. Refocus.
At the far end of the basalt cave, I secure ideal sight-access!
Slowly, I translate the placard
posted on the cave-wall:
Buddha-image behind falls named Jizo.
Guardian deity
of small children. Carved
from natural rock by Kobo-Daishi. First Shingon
Buddhist in Japan
Balancing on the cave-ledge,
we lean over the pool rim to peer
at the lofty fine chisel-work of the priest,
the gentle curvaceous face and shoulders
looming above us from the twenty-foot-high
Divinity carved in shallow
relief,
indenting the rock to varying depths, sunk to a foot or two
in elongated gaps
framing the cheeks (hovering, neckless, over wide shoulders)
and columnar
thick biceps; below,
his delicate turned-in hands resting on cross-

legged lap, the fingers upcurled, knuckles
and thumb-tips of both hands touching,
each to each: in *Mudra* position, hand-symbol
of sermonizing.

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From our perch, the falls
drape the Buddha diagonally, half-blurred
by the shawl of falling
water,
half-clear and distinct.
We try to visualize the brave sculptor-
priest stretching his gaunt
lank-fasted frame slenderer on tip-toe to keep from toppling,
sucked
into torrents of the water-
wall just parallel to his back, and flung
headforemost into the pool-side granite!
Now we see him mounting his makeshift
scaffold of woven osiers and vines, climbing
the wickerwork ladder toward the high

great creaseless forehead and intricate marbly
design of the noble God's
corona.
We see him chopping and battering the wonderful half-shut
eyelids shaped like butterfly
wings, his elbows often grazed by the churning water
behind him—
adjacent to his heaving shoulders
wielding the primitive hammer and stone chisel—
sending a charge of hydroelectric power
into each of his swings.
How happy
he is, the magic voltage of the falls roaring
into his limbs, animating his whole
skeleton with a power like fire—fire borne
of water; his slim frame
seems to shed
all remains of flesh, exposing a radiant luminous bone-
tree.
He shudders and quakes
with love-toil, hovers as a candle-flame pants on its wick.
"Kobo-Daishi,
Kobo-Daishi":
his name on my lips,
a gasped murmur, rises to prayerful chant,

the girls winking. (Impish snickers.) I point
to the statue,
"See him there, watch
his swings! Oh how he dances hammer-blows
into the stone, the sparks flying
all around his flushed neck and ears, a galaxy

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of flint-sown stars doused
in the falls,
instantly reborn, showering from tireless blows of his stone
hammer, dying out,
born afresh each moment, constellations of fiery pin-points
of light—
a frenzy of creation!—
circling his voluptuous strokes."
But they
see a different scene, their yelps—barks
of alarm—shattering my spiel.
Their truant brother, the family drifter,
reappears at the Buddha's base.

How did he scale the steep rocky slopes behind
the falls, daring to leap
over a corner
of pool-edge, passing unnoticed by the rear approachway—
surprising us?
Trapped
between rival impulses to scold and warn him, I choke
down my cries,
and sink into the cave-wall
at my back, dazed.
He ignores us, squatting
on the narrow ledge at the statue's foot,
parodies the Divinity's cross-legged
straight-backed posture, the blank stony
stare and half-closed eyelids.
Now he begins
to slip down the slight incline of his roost,
the seat of his pants
and trousers-
legs sliding him toward the perilous junction of falls
and pool.
He tumbles,
half-losing his balance (no hiding the fear in his eyes),
rolls over
on his side, and scrambles
to safety—clenching his sister's outstretched

hand, dancing and cavorting the last few
steps to simulate poise, control.
My hand, open palm flat to the cave-side,
braces my weight. I hold steady,
let the spinning lights slow down behind shut
eyelids, shortness of breath
freezing me

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to the spot.
The children's voices fade, thinning
in the distance as they skip
downstream, following the run-off from the pool outlet.
The shaking fit
falters. Quits . . .
Dreamily,
I brush my fingers up and down, from right
to left in widening circles, startled
by the coarse texture of wall,
varying in color from dark gray to black—
thinking, *igneous, igneous rock.*

Fire-begotten. Fire-container. Glassy hardness
repeats my pulse. Wall-rock
thumps
with my stolen heart-beat, my blood flow thudding in stone.
My lifelines—handprint whorls—
fight down terror, finding deep calm in the touch of rock.
When Kobo-Daishi
paused, dreamt between chains
of hammer-blows, he knew this wedding of flesh
to mountain-rock, this union of opposed
bodies to make a third, a vessel,
a medium, a mock-human brooding image:
the Buddha Ikon:
a stone body
inviting the great Spirit of the God to enter,
to become enshrined, to inhabit
the stone skull,
stone breast, folded stone limbs—with grace of touch
the God enchanted by the man
to break holy silence, to rise from the mute invisible
void and enter
the avatar of body-form,
engaging the man in a lordly dance of Spirit:

the human to be rewarded with eternal grace,
and grace to all who come after
by luck to this consecrated place of blessings
to children: safe passage, safe
child-passage throughout life . . . Kobo-Daishi, who,
in caves north of this gully,
met and fought
and subdued demons, then sculpted the rock-embossed body
of the God beside the falls . . .
Again, I pass my hand across the wall, sweeping from side
to side. Tall

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wavy columns of basalt rock.
No lava-slag. No vomitus from the planet bowels
crater-spewn, leaving blanketed acres of live
topsoil smothered by black dross.
No formless wild spatter of chunks. No coughed-up
clots of earth-blood . . .
My palms imbibe

flaming masses of liquid earth, sudden rivers
exploding between continental
shelves
and shaped into wall-forms below the surface, the columns
jutting closer and closer
to the planet skin, the mountain evolving layer by layer
from within—
a struggle to contain
the swelling pool of fire.
My pulse is afire.
I stroke this chilled rock-face, volcanic
braille, deciphering by touch
the fantastic blaze which melted the earth,
the violent magma-boil tearing
deep cracks in earth's lower crust, molten
fire-rock thrusting upwards,
freezing
in place, quick-set and quick-shaped in formed columns,
earth's fireball center
sculpting and re-sculpting its surface outwards . . .
Here,
in this place
of change—midway sector,
caught between form and flow, essence

passing between shape and unshapen fluid,
this incision in cliff-side, this mouth,
this great unstanched wound in world's body—
I read the peristalsis of her cycles.
Igneous rock. *Fire-born. Fire-swallower.*
Quick-melted, quick-set
in the cooling
of its own fires.
Ah!—to contain vast inner fires,
then to be shaped
by effusions and wanings of the flames, riding the wave
of torrential
flow, trapping the blaze
in marbly-veined shapely cloumns.

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My body's
dreamscape! Naked border zone where earth's liquid
core and chilled outer crust meet.
In this place of delicate thresholds, birth
is open wide, the kiss

of deep inner fires still close to the surface—
all transformations! All
fountainings!
Hot spring waters boiling into steams.
Geysers spouting
fumy sprays.
Liquid
rock bursting to the surface, crystallizing into minerals,
jewels,
and walls of volcanic
glass.
The falls igniting into foam . . . .
Beachcombers, seaside vagrants, we chose lowland
peripheries, but uplands chose us,
wafting us up foothills to summits, luring us
down into the mountain's innards.
We voyage into *the gash*—exposed interior
of earth's tender Mucosa,
membranous
lining of her body cavities, her panoramic acreage of rock-
viscera laid bare . . .
I saunter
down the stream-side path knowing, as never before, earth's
give-and-take,
the recoil and snapback
of gravelly walkway, springy to footfalls.

3. THE WHOLE BREATH

I meet the children dropping hook-and-line
from handmade bamboo poles
into the brook,
run-off waters from the falls.
Fish strike the small
breadballs of bait
in mid-air, leaping from below, their tails kicking up
little whirlpools
on the surface.
The young men
who lent the poles, reclining in idle poses,

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applaud, while the children toss their whole catch
back into the stream—three bucketsful—
each unhooked fish lively, flapping, uninjured,
the human sport a brief detour
in their joyous cycle from mountain-top birth
to valley streams, riverway
to the sea.
Here, near the exploding falls, all life-lines between man
and creature connect,
connect Everywhere, the life of water rock fish child
sweeps
from form to form: glorious
interchange!—the alive of all terrestrial

families nurturing every alive other One by One
by One the smashed waters dying
at the God's foot issuing forth from the sleep
of the deep crater-pool into child-
blessing rivulets: a place of healing!
Molten rock
boiling and burbling upwards
from below,
iron-heavy pile-driving waters flung down from the peaks above:
this atmosphere, each holy
influx of our dream-breath yawned from the wide free life space
of Divine
Breath—opening all around us
like Mozart's celestial music—is fatefully tinged
with a fragrance of commingled heights and depths
a message that passes fiercely from breath
into mind held in mind's grip as volcanic falls
in aged mountain's memory are gripped

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JOHN SIMON

The Word on Film

LET ME BEGIN BY EXPLAINING MY TITLE, "The Word on Film." It is not to be taken as meaning the lowdown on cinema, but as an attempt to assess the role of dialogue in the movies, where it has been generally miscast. Often it has been given a stellar part in a film that could not support it; at other times it has been assigned a mere supporting role in films that could have greatly profited from more extensive use of its talent. The result appears to have been that people who ought to know better have viewed the spoken word in movies with suspicion, condescension, indeed hostility; while other people have been pleased to regard the film as an infant that has learned to talk in the natural process of growing older—what the child is saying, however, as long as it makes rudimentary sense, is of no great import. My own point is that the word in the cinema—contrary to the opinion of those who consider it ancillary or downright negligible, if not indeed subversive of the true powers of the art—is, in fact, of primary importance, and must be nurtured and developed rather than subordinated and downgraded. I insist that film as it has or will come to be is a fully audiovisual medium rather than a visual one like painting, sculpture, or silent movies; and that, as such, its voice has to be as good as its movements and vision.

If I now turn to an attack on my film criticism by Professor Edward Murray in his book, *Nine American Film Critics: A Study in Theory and Practice,* it is not because I consider either my criticism or Professor Murray that important. But it was his remarks that spurred me on to compose this essay, and Mr. Murray, as only begetter, is entitled to his place on the threshold of my discussion. He writes: "It is doubtful whether any responsible film critic or theorist would agree with Simon that the word is equal in significance to the image. Sound has greatly extended the reach of film as art; speech allows the filmmaker to reveal character in greater depth and to explore theme in more detail than was possible in the silent-film period. But to say that sound is now an integral part of film is not to argue that word and image are of equal importance. Film is still . . . a basically pictorial medium. If this were not so,

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then why does Simon himself say that 'dialogue conveys only a fragment of what happens in a film'?" Here let me interject that fragments come in all sizes and degrees of importance: the Venus de Milo and the Victory of Samothrace are also fragments, but rather more important and satisfying to the Louvre than the missing parts would be to the institution that might acquire them.

But to return to Mr. Murray, who, as one would have guessed, proceeds to agree with those "opponents" of mine who have "charged" that I am "more of a literary critic than a film critic," and offers as evidence that I seldom or never cite film theorists, whereas literary references are "such a conspicuous feature" of my writing. I could answer that the literary figures I am apt to quote write immeasurably better than the film theorists Mr. Murray lists as unquoted by me: what is more relevant, though, is that I abhor most theorists and take a dim view of theory itself, which is why I implore you to take what follows also with an appropriate number of grains of salt.

The pejorative "literary," as applied to a film or film critic of a supposedly literary bent, is one of the keys to our problem. This hostile use of "literary" antedates questions of film and has been hotly debated in the realm of the fine arts, which, according to most modernist painters, sculptors and art critics, had to be freed of "literary" content. It is probably from this source that film inherited its anti-literary—and, by extension, anti-verbal—bias, yet what may apply to the fine arts is irrelevant to film. For a painting, clearly, is not based on a script; films, however, even those preconized by the most anti-literary elements, are so based. The screenplay may be a very poor piece of literature—as it frequently is—nonetheless, a piece of liteature it is. Hence "literary" seems like a highly self-destructive term of opprobrium.

But similar accusations are hurled from other embattled positions as well. One of them is the historical or, better, historicist position. This view is based on the fact that film was for a long time silent, which resulted in the early film theorists' concerning themselves with silent films. But even some of the later and still very influential ones, like Arnheim, Panofsky and others, grew up in the silent-film era, formed their cinematic tastes from silent pictures, became sentimentally involved with them, and resented the coming of talkies almost as much as did silent-screen stars with squeaky voices. Thus the concept of film as a visual medium was formulated and accepted at a time when it could not have been any other kind

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of medium, any more than a carriage could have been horseless before the invention of the automobile. So if Rudolf Arnheim speaks of the sound film as a "radical aesthetic impoverishment," the real reason for this discontent may be nothing more than psychological: in his youth, films were silent, and both his older years and his attitude toward film in them may have been less glowing—hence the alleged impoverishment.

There is, again, the so-called purist position. Thus Erwin Panofsky, the distinguished art scholar whose essay, "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," is still a much anthologized and revered landmark of film theory, argued: ". . . A moving picture, even when it has learned to talk, remains a picture that moves and does not convert itself into a piece of writing that is enacted. Its substance remains a series of visual sequences held together by an uninterrupted flow of movement in space . . . and not a sustained study in human character and destiny transmitted by effective, let alone 'beautiful' diction." And, Panofsky continues, "the sound, articulate or not, cannot express any more than is expressed, at the same time, by visible movement; and in a good film it does not even attempt to do so." This position is by no means a forgotten curiosity dating back to the 1930's. Panofsky himself revised the essay several times over the years without taking out these remarks; the very same ideas—or should we properly call them sentiments?—are still echoed in important quarters today. Only quite recently I had an argument with Maximilian Schell in which he insisted that not for nothing was the medium called motion pictures, and that what we remembered, what we carried with us from a film was certain images, not bits of dialogue. As he kept reiterating his point, I could not help thinking, "Play it again, Sam!"—the line that, with the song that goes with it, is what I remember most vividly from *Casablanca*—even if it does not occur quite like that in the film.

To make a fetish out of the term *motion* or *moving* picture strikes me as an oversimplification. It is a term that describes the type of pictures a kind of camera could take as opposed to those of an earlier type of camera; it does not pretend to define or limit the uses to which film can be put. Even if you are stupid, arrogant and untalented enough to mount your camera on a tripod in front of the Empire State Building and keep shooting for several hours, the result is a motion picture, though the building does not make the slightest attempt to compensate for the stationary camera by dancing a jig. More to the point, Susan Sontag, in her essay, "Theatre

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and Film," has answered Panofsky with a question, a very pertinent question: "What then of the films of Bresson and Godard, with their allusive, thoughtful texts and their characteristic refusal to be primarily a visual experience? How could one explain the extraordinary rightness of Ozu's relatively immobilized camera?"

What, we must ask ourselves, are the purists bemoaning? The great director, René Clair, wrote in 1950 that "speech and sound, adding the element of reality to the film presentation, have made the viewer lose the feeling of dream that the sight of the silent shadows created in him." The theme of regret at the coming of sound runs through Clair's entire book, *Cinema Yesterday and Today,* and, because this collection of texts spans more than half a century, through Clair's entire creative life. It is evident that the director of such masterpieces as *Le Million* and *A Nous la Liberté,* which might have worked as well without their minimal verbal content, was concerned with the claim of the dream on us, with making life, or at least that part of it that could be captured between the beginning and end of one of his films, as idiosyncratic and whimsical as a dream. Harsh realities are not totally absent from Clair's work, but the aim is to transform them into something lyrical and palliative like a happy reverie. Not necessarily a bad aim, but not one to which all cinema can or should subscribe.

If what lurks behind Clair's championing of wordless cinema is the dream, what hides behind Panofsky's position is something slightly different and comes out in praise for "early melodramas [that] had a highly gratifying and soothing quality in that events took shape, without the complications of individual psychology, according to a pure Aristotelian logic so badly missed in real life." And when he goes on to praise various types of genre films, Panofsky makes clear to me that he speaks for those intellectuals, often but not always associated with the academy, for whom the movies are a mode of escape from intellect, from the rigorous forms of daily mental discipline—an escape abundantly provided by melodramas, farces, Westerns, thrillers, and the rest. To invoke Aristotelian logic, or any other prestigious or modish nomenclature, is only a way of legitimizing, of making respectable, that "soothing and gratifying quality" associated with movies as a flight from "the complications of individual psychology."

It is well to consider here that one's sociopolitical and philosophical views may also cause one to opt for a cinema in which words are subordinate. Thus Panofsky writes, "It is the movies, and only the

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movies, that do justice to that materialistic interpretation of the universe which, whether we like it or not, pervades contemporary civilization." How sharply this tone of resignation to materialism contrasts with that of the Italian essayist and critic, Nicola Chiaromonte, who wrote in a 1965 essay entitled "Theater in Utopia," from an idealist-elitist point of view, "The tendency to underestimate inner life and moral phenomena is one of the salient characteristics of modern barbarity, as well as one of the most obvious effects of the cinema on the psychology of the masses." The problem with the cinematic image, for Chiaromonte, is that "it cannot render thought, consciousness, or ideas, for the simple reason that the camera cannot catch these modes of reality, but, rather, their material and external aspects."

The interesting thing to note here is that both the reluctant advocate of materialism and its aristocratic opponent perceive the cinema as essentially visual, but draw from its visualness different conclusions. This agreement within opposition becomes even more arresting when we consider the following pair of statements. First, Chiaromonte again, denying the validity of the word on film:

> What is certain is that the spoken word cannot be replaced. The recorded word, the word of the cinema, the word of radio, the word of television not only lack a living presence, but are not real words; they are something else, something entirely different. They are artificial words, part of an artificial language valid for everybody and for nobody at the same time. The word accompanied by a living presence, on the other hand, is not only a clear word, which reaches us free of mechanical diaphragms; it is also, above all, an authentic word, addressed to us in particular and in the concrete, not in the general and the abstract. It is addressed not only to our ear but to our spirit, to our mind, to our consciousness, and it is therefore the only word capable of conveying a fullness of meaning.

By now, we see, Chiaromonte has conceded a verbal facility to the film, but only to deny its vitality and trenchancy vis-à-vis the theater. This strikes me as only a more sophisticated version of the old theater person's argument against the movies—that what people want to see is flesh and blood, not celluloid—a theory that gets its conclusive refutation by the simple comparison of box-office takes at cinemas and so-called legitimate theaters.

While Chiaromonte chastises the film for trying to talk yet being inherently unable to do it well, René Clair exults in the film's ability to talk superlatively without recourse to words: "I believe,"

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he wrote in 1923, "that the film is only at the beginning of its conquest of the inner world. The succession of images, infinitely supple, now as precise as a phrase in literature and now as vague as a phrase in music, will make possible the expression of the most complex feelings and the remotest sensations. Will not the film be able to suggest to the general public more easily than the word the things they cannot understand or accept in the theories of Freud or the novels of Proust?" As opposed to film as a barbarous demotic art form that, even with words, cannot speak profoundly, we encounter here film as a blessedly democratic genre speaking with simple, wordless directness to the general public. Since it can be argued that children, aborigines, and the mentally retarded can deal with pictures more easily than with words, those who want film to be a mass art naturally espouse its pictorial and kinetic, rather than verbal and intellectual, aspects.

Yet in all this I smell that to me rather malodrous creature, the inveterate theoretician. For whereas it is indisputable that simple images are easier than complex words, and probable that simple images are easier than simple words, who says that filmmakers can, or want to, deal only with simple images? The images in a film like *Persona* are as complex, allusive and elusive, arduous to explicate as the words in any modern novel or poem, let alone movie. The general public would much sooner embrace the words in most movies, no matter how thick and fast they might come off the soundtrack, than the often arcane or abstruse imagery of Bergman's film. Furthermore, there are poetically pregnant utterances in certain films that may function satisfactorily on the lower level of general comprehension, and sublimely on the higher one of minds equipped to deal with symbol, metaphor, double entendre, irony, and the like. And for all that the great age of American film comedy may have been a nonverbal one, it would be precarious to argue that the verbal comedy of Fields, the Marx Brothers, and the rest was very far behind.

But there is yet another source of hostility to words on film that is the exact opposite of that of the weary intellectual eager to get away from his daily discursiveness. I refer to the position of the anti- or nonintellectual, the person who is defeated by words, fears and abominates them, and looks to the movies as an alternative to verbalization. I do not wish to put the blame for the new anti-verbalism on the movies alone; it is a tremendous symptom of the general falling off of our culture on levels as diverse as language

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study in the universities and the ability of people, students or others, to express themselves in speech or writing, indeed, to comprehend what they read. If one compares the lyrics of popular songs of the twenties, thirties, and forties with those of the fifties and beyond—or, roughly speaking, the pre- and post-rock lyrics—one will experience fully the recession of the word. Similarly in the avant-garde theater, the word has faded into the background; more revealingly perhaps, the comparison of boulevard plays by Behrman and Barry with those of Neil Simon and his ilk epitomizes the waning of verbal proficiency.

It would be an oversimplification to trace this general deverbalization to a single cause, cultural, social, economic, or political. But its effects are felt across the board; in the cinema, which doubtless is one of the many culprits, no less than elsewhere. And, of course, there is a vicious circle: if the movies contribute to the hebetude of those who absorb them, they, in turn, will become stultifying filmmakers in an ever-worsening progression. And with the coming into existence and growing popularity of underground cinema with its very limited budgets, the silent film with perhaps a little pop music, as it were, taped onto it, has once again come into favor.

Moreover, the overwhelming preponderance of abstract art, as well as certain trends in "serious" music, deemphasizing representational or "human" elements, have spilled over into film to the further detriment of the word—at least as coherent dialogue. In this respect it is worth noting that even a big-budget, more or less establishment filmmaker like Robert Altman has tended to conceive of dialogue as a kind of verbal wallpaper of which one is supposed to be only generally or subliminally aware, without actually deciphering more than a modest fraction of it. It seems to me that abstract art of almost all kinds partakes of anti-intellectualism or game-playing, whether practiced by disenchanted intellectuals or enchanting ignoramuses, and so we are back to the question of the debasement of cinematic dialogue as part of the overarching disrepute and desuetude of the Word. When Alexandre Astruc coined his famous definition of a personal cinema as the product of a *caméra-stylo*, a camera functioning as a fountain pen, he prophesied even more than he described: what the pen used to be in the hands of occasional illiterates, the camera, often literally handheld, has become in hordes of illiterate hands—a gobbledygook of images with or without words.

It is time, however, to return to Edward Murray's original

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charge, that according to me the word on film is equal in significance to the image. He bases his accusation on the following passage from my book, *Ingmar Bergman Directs:*

> I take film to be a totally visual and totally aural medium—in this ambidextrousness lies its glory—and I consider utterly mistaken and nostalgic the sentimentality of those exalters of time past who would put the silent film above the sound, or in any other way minimize the importance of the ear in the enjoyment of film. Although I would not slight the functions of the other senses, I do think vision and audition are the ones by which we communicate best and the most. To the extent that film can make untrammeled use of both those avenues of communication, it can absorb us more masterfully and variously (though not, therefore, more importantly) than any other art, including the theater, whose visual discourse is somewhat more limited. Now, though a filmmaker who masters the visual possibilities of cinema is to be admired, the true lord of the medium is he who controls equally sight and sound, whose word is as good as his image, and, above all, who can manipulate the two in such a way that they reinforce each other and perform in unison or harmony, contrast or counterpoint, at the filmmaker's beck.

All right, then, I plead guilty: I did and do say that image and sound are equally important to the film. But to evaluate this statement, we must first try to reach a fuller understanding of what is meant by the words "equally important." Let me say it right out: I am not a statistician, and I cannot reduce film to 50% images and 50% sounds, which latter would then have to be further subdivided into words and other kinds of sound. Nor am I a horse trader, with the horrible gift of haggling attributed to that profession; so, if someone were to say, "How about images 60%, and words 40%?" I might go along with him, although I could not settle for less. And even then two questions would immediately present themselves. First, how do you arrive at those figures? And, secondly, can you determine actual importance by any such mathematical means?

Let me illustrate with a hypothetical example. Suppose we had a film in which an adolescent girl obediently and more or less mutely performed everything her father demanded, odious or onerous as some of the tasks were. Suppose, furthermore, that her face never betrayed any hostile feelings. This goes on for perhaps thirty minutes; then, quite unexpectedly, the girl confronts her father and says, "I hate you!" Only she does not say that exactly; she says it in a few more highly original words, well chosen but not beyond the vocabulary of an adolescent, and not out of proportion to what she has been subjected. She says it forthrightly and compellingly. The

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words would take some thirty seconds of painfully sobering screen time. How would one reckon the half hour of dismal experiences *shown* versus the thirty seconds of cathartic outburst *spoken*? Surely you cannot say that thirty seconds goes into thirty minutes sixty times, and that our stretch of film is therefore sixty parts visuals to one part words. Yet no more could you say that the actions of the thirty minutes merely lead up to that climactic ejaculation, merely set it up, and are thus quite unimportant compared to it.

Someone shrewd or perverse enough might, of course, claim that if the filmmaker were truly gifted, he would not need to make the girl say anything; he could suggest it more powerfully through certain looks and gestures. But is this true? In the notes to Jean-Paul Sartre's lecture, "Theater and Cinema" (for which, as with Aristotle, only the notes are available), we read: "Speech is the clearest gesture; that is, the clearest representation of the act is speech." I am not quite sure what Sartre meant by this, but I take it to mean that our fictitious bit of film can express through words just how long, to what degree, and against what inner and outer pressures the girl's hatred for her father has been welling up, and what she now proposes to do about it, or what compensation, if any, she is willing to settle for. Her words can then be assessed in the light of the events that precede and follow them, but we need this "clearest gesture" or "clearest representation" to understand fully and evaluate what the actions permitted us only to sense and sympathize with. Then, too, the girl may do nothing about it; everything may go on as before, even though the relationship may be utterly changed after the full awareness that torrent of words swept out into the open. To quote that sensible book by Stephenson and Debrix, *The Cinema as Art,* it is a case of "visuals and sound . . . reinforc[ing] one another. The combination can be more powerful than the sum of the two would be."

If I say then that I would not want my supposititious film to have lacked either the incidents preceding the outburst or the outburst itself, what can I honestly conclude from that? Only that images and words are, for all practical purposes, equally important. And we must bear in mind that if the happenings before the verbal eruption were badly shown, the words, however excellent, could not redeem half an hour of ineffectual film. Likewise, if the words were banal, derivative, verbose, or out of character, the most graphic or suggestive action would be marred by them. Still, the captious defender of visuals *über alles* might contend that if the girl

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had just uttered a simple and searing "I hate you!" accompanied by good acting, camera work, background music, and what have you, those plain, unliterary words would suffice to yield first-class filmmaking. Not so, I say. Unless the girl is a halfwit or an utter simpleton—which could also be quite moving, but does not happen to be the case in my scenario, or, for that matter, in most scenarios—we are going to judge her sensibility, her sensitivity and humanity, by her ability to express herself in words that have freshness, flavor, poetry in them; whether we like it or not, a hero or heroine has to appeal to us physically and verbally, which is to say erotically and intellectually, thus affirming the simultaneous importance of the seen and the heard.

Here let me explain my view of the place of film in the context of the performing arts. I perceive these arts as a scale extending from poetry (which, we tend to forget, was meant to be recited), the most verbal and least kinetic, all the way to the dance, the most kinetic and least verbal. Bunched together at the center between these extremes are two middle arts: theater, which is somewhat nearer to poetry; and cinema, which is closer to dance. I mean by this that the more obvious emphasis in theater is on words, because the stage restricts the possibilities of movement and action; and that the more immediate emphasis in films is on such movement and action, because the camera can go everywhere, move in every conceivable way—and what it cannot do, the film lab can. Nevertheless, I wish to underline my contention that these different stresses, however significant, are only external differences between theater and film, determining what type of situation or story is best suited to each genre, but not meaning that the theater can dispense with action or that the film can afford to be cavalier about dialogue. Let the theater forget to put actions on stage, and it becomes a kind of poetry recital, a nice enough thing in itself, but not theater; let the film forget about the expressive power of words, and it becomes a kind of pantomime or dance, with much of the dancing done by the camera and editing. That, too, may be nice to watch, but it does not live up to the highest potential of film.

To put it another way, we are proceeding along a scale of arts where, at one end, the flesh has become totally word, while at the other, the word has become totally flesh; that is, poetry and dance. But the peculiar greatness of theater and film lies in the fact that they are jugglers with both these techniques or strategies—that they can make deed and word, action and comment, image and

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idea flow into each other, merge and separate again, proceed parallelly or alternatingly, and reflect on each other in a variety of ways, from overlapping to counterpoint. Both have a chance at what Wagner wanted opera to be: a *gesamtkunstwerk* or total work of art, subsuming all the other arts. Film, though, has the best chance of all three to be all-encompassing, but only if it remembers the importance of words and allows them their due.

In this context, it is useful to quote Orson Welles's remarks to Francis Koval in a 1950 interview for *Sight and Sound:* "You all seem to start from the article of faith that a silent picture is necessarily better than a sound one . . . . What I mean to say is that you always overstress the value of images. You judge films by their visual impact instead of looking for content. This is a great disservice to cinema. It is like judging a novel only by the quality of its prose. I was guilty of the same sin when I first started writing about the cinema. It was the experience of filmmaking that changed my outlook." Koval, who admits to being startled by such opinions from the man who made *Citizen Kane,* a film of extraordinary visual impact, reports these further Wellesian comments: "Take a picture that has become a classic, and deservedly so: *La Femme du boulanger.* What have you got there? Bad photography, inadequate cutting and a lot of happenings which are told instead of shown. But there is a story and an actor—both superb—which makes it a perfect movie. The story is not even particularly 'cinema.' I think I could make a play out of it in one evening, if I wanted to." And Welles concludes: "It is really more a combination of human factors and basic ideas that makes a subject worth putting on the screen."

While one need not agree with every syllable of this—very probably Welles relished being a counterirritant to the critical consensus—there is much common sense in these observations, and I only wish their maker had borne them in mind when he went to work on some of his subsequent films. It is certainly instructive to note how many of the world's influential, and often great, filmmakers were theater people before, and frequently even after, they came to the movies: Sergei Eisenstein in Russia; Welles and Kazan in the United States; Sir Carol Reed in England; Abel Gance, Marcel Pagnol, and Jean Cocteau in France; Pabst and Murnau in Germany; Sjöström, Stiller, Sjöberg, and Ingmar Bergman in Sweden; Luchino Visconti and Lina Wertmüller in Italy—to name only the most salient. So it might be wise to bear this in mind before writing essays on the differences between theater and cinema, real

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though some of them may be. And let me add a further name to my list: that of a man who, though he did not come to the movies from the theater, was always a devotee of it, later directed stage productions, wrote plays, used great stage actors in his films, and indeed made the theater, or theatricality, the main theme of a number of his pictures. You will have guessed that I refer to Jean Renoir.

What theater and film have in common is the bisensory approach: reaching us neither just through the eye, like painting or architecture, nor just through the ear, like music or, to a large extent, poetry, but through both senses. To be sure, this presents certain risks. Nothing is more loathsome about that less than prepossessing medium, television, than certain commercials in which a voice declaims in stentorian tones the very same message that is written out on the screen, as if the sponsors were terrified of missing out on the deaf and blind segments of the audience. This redundancy is the archetypal trap into which the sound film can fall: making what is heard an unnecessary duplication of what is seen. Clearly it is tautological to have a man fumbling for a keyhole in the dark declare how hard it is to find a keyhole in the dark—unless the point is that he is a crashing bore—yet much filmmaking is just that dedicated to supererogation. Or, perhaps, just that boring. But dialogue can achieve wonders if the man complains in a well-lighted hall: we realize with a pang that he is going blind. Or the man may complain about the difficulty of finding the keyhole even as his key slips almost instantaneously into the lock, and we realize with amusement that he is a petty malcontent. Or he may start complaining before he has even reached the door, in which case we recognize him in a flash as an inveterate pessimist, always assuming the worst. These, then, are a few of the ways in which words and visuals become more powerful in combination than either of them could be alone.

Yet the interplay between visual and verbal elements need not always be as trickily out-of-sync as that. Let me cite some other examples of interaction between sight and sound from recent movies, not even particularly great ones. In Dino Risi's *Profumo di donna* (rather badly Englished as *Scent of a Woman*), there is the following sequence. The blinded ex-officer hero who abominates the pity people show for his infirmity sits on a restaurant terrace and awaits the return of his seeing-eye boy, whom he sent off to find him a suitable prostitute. While the boy is away looking, our hero pretends to be reading the newspapers. The boy finally settles on a

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woman in a run-down café; as the prostitute rises to go home and wait for her client, a shabby old man in the café looks up from his paper and jovially exclaims, "*Buon lavoro!*"—good work! Risi now cuts to the hero on the terrace reading a socialist-labor publication—we can make out the banner: *IL LAVORO*. We have here a complex audio-visual pun: the socialist-labor orientation of the paper is contrasted with the dubious, capitalist-oriented labor of the whore. Nevertheless, even a down-at-heel old-timer, both biologically and economically out of the running, smilingly approves her kind of work, gives it his vicariously pleased benediction. Meanwhile the socialist workers' notions are wasted on the blind aristocrat who, even if he could read them, could not appreciate them. What the film seems to be saying here is that one person's work is another's pleasure; that grave notions of the nature and rights of labor may fall on blind eyes not only among sightless aristocrats but also among sighted proletarians.

Now, it may be pointed out in opposition that "*Buon lavoro!*" is not great dialogue (true), and that its place could have been taken just as well by an intertitle (false). An intertitle would have been a visual element, no different from the name of the newspaper in the hero's hand. But it is precisely by going from a spoken and heard *lavoro* to a printed and seen (or, in the hero's case, unseen) *lavoro* that we are tipped off about the difference between kinds of labor, and all the sad, funny, or simply matter-of-fact implications of that difference. The old man's comment could, of course, have been omitted altogether, but only to the appreciable impoverishment of the film.

Let us advert now to another example of a quite dissimilar nature: two consecutive scenes from *Salut, l'Artiste!*, a film by Yves Robert. The hero, played by Marcello Mastroianni, is an Italian bit player eking out a humdrum existence in French theater, movies, television, commercials, nightclubs, and still more peripheral regions of show business. Besides troubles with his finances and children, he has perennial problems with women: his ex-wife, his mistress, and a passing parade of all the others he lusts for. In one of this fine but by no means extraordinary film's loveliest scenes, Mastroianni and his mistress, played by the incomparable Françoise Fabian, are walking along the sandy seaside of Cabourg. It was supposed to have been a weekend of reconciliation and rekindling of a love our hero has been foolishly jeopardizing. The sky, however, is overcast; the beach, cold, gray, deserted. The man tries to

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blame his accumulated failures on the Italian accent that makes him a sempiternal stranger in France, but his companion points out that he would be a stranger anywhere, even in Rome. Certain actors are said to have a presence, but what he has, fundamentally, is an absence: "*Quelle absence tu as!*" she tells him. "*Tu n'es personne pour personne!*" ("What absence you have! You are nobody for nobody!" Ungrammatical, but wonderfully right.) The hero's anguished face and oversolicitous tone convey both his awareness that he is prevaricating and his histrionic inadequacy; the woman's tormented gaze and her leaning toward him suggest how much she still loves the man she must leave. Sight—the cheerless surroundings, moody camera angles, nervous cutting; and sound—the exchange of words between a sadly mendacious lover and still more sadly truthful mistress—combine into a sovereign vision of despair. But the clinching effect is achieved by the next shot, in which the disaffected lovers are seen brunching in a deserted hotel dining room. Outside, the beach is as drained of color as before. In the foreground, at an open glass-paneled door, a middle-aged waitress, with her back to the camera, is gazing out at the sea. Farther back, at an ideal lovers' table by the plate-glass window, sit our hero and heroine. They, too, look bleached out; neither of them speaks nor stirs. The only movement is that of the drapes straining in the breeze at the open door. The waitress and the drapes seem full of yearning; the lovers, empty. It is a devastating image that scores largely through its silence after all those heated or weary or remonstrating words of the preceding scene. This is the reverse of Yeats's "Speech after long silence"—silence after long speech, and it took a speaking cinema to make silence become eloquent in the movies.

In the introduction to his Hitchcock book, François Truffaut enunciated what he calls "the cardinal rule of the cinema: Whatever is *said* instead of being *shown* is lost upon the viewer." This and similar notions are based on the assumption that word and image are two separate entities, a concept at least as fallacious in my opinion as the debunked old notion that form and content are discrete aspects of a work of art. I think it is mandatory for us to comprehend that sight and sound, image and word, function as two eyes do in our head, giving us the kind of depth perception we would not have with a single Cyclops eye. Nevertheless, Truffaut's statement oversimplifies even the concept of "shown." Take the nurse's account of a summertime orgy on the beach from Berg-

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man's *Persona*; Pauline Kael has rightly recognized that it is "one of the rare, truly erotic sequences on film." This is a case of no flashbacks intruding on pure narration: nothing is shown except the excitement of the nurse as she tells the story, and the slightly insidious savoring of it by the listening actress. There is a strange, unstated erotic bond between the two women held together by the shared narrative. You do indeed see something on screen, only it is not an enactment of what the words describe. The orgy becomes real enough through the aptly written and delivered words, but what is *shown* is the effect of the words on these two women in their resembling nightgowns: a naïve nurse spilling her secrets to her uncannily silent patient who takes it all in like a cat—a cat not so much lapping up milk as swallowing a canary. We are made to perceive subtle, indirect connections between the narrative and the relationship of the two women.

It should be obvious, though it isn't to many people, that the word, by being put on screen, becomes something more than, or at any rate different from, a word on paper, or even a word on the stage. The printed word may be highly evocative, but its evocativeness functions solely in terms of what the reader brings to it. The word in the theater is accompanied by some gestures and trappings, but these gestures are limited by the distance between the actor and the audience, just as the trappings are modest compared to what the cinema can surround the speakers with. On screen, the word performs, as it were, in concert with faces in closeup that can be exceedingly, even unbearably, near to the viewer; or with backgrounds that can be an actual jungle full of assorted perils; or with a convincing piece of trick photography that can make everything from deeply hidden private fantasies to the farthest reaches of outer space come palpitantly alive. The word gains unprecedented richness from its context, but it pays back the debt by interpreting the images with poetic or psychological, historical or philosophic insights such as no image in painting or still photography can benefit from.

In a recent book by Professor Frank D. McConnell of Northwestern University, *The Spoken Seen: Film and the Romantic Imagination*, we find among much that is pretentious, windy, even absurd, some perfectly sensible descriptions of the profound and necessary interaction of image and word on film. "No other art," McConnell writes, "is able to register with quite the same immediacy the solidity and the clutter of the human universe, and at the same time

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the awful fragility of the words we speak to each other amid that clutter." Except for the solecism "each other" where "one another" is meant, this is a very good evocation of one aspect of the relation of words to their on-screen ambience. But the obverse is equally true and important: the ability of the right words to triumph over the surrounding clutter and give meaning to the universe. In film's greatest moments, however, both ends are achieved simultaneously: the awareness of our verbal, indeed existential, fragility; and the revelation of the strength that comes from understanding and acceptance.

Take the final words of *The Seven Samurai,* one of the masterpieces of Akira Kurosawa and world cinema. Of the seven samurai defending the farmers, only three have survived. Standing on a bridge and looking down at the peasants blithely back at work in their rice paddies, Kambei, the wise leader of the samurai, remarks, "We've lost again." Shichoriji, the jolly extrovert, looks puzzled. Kambei explains: "Those farmers are the winners. Not we." As he turns and looks up, the camera tilts with his gaze up the burial hill and comes to rest on the four mounds with the dead men's swords stuck into them. I quote from the screenplay: "The samurai theme comes in over the planting music, as the wind blows up the dust among the mounds." Kambei's head movements are symbolic: when he says that *we,* i.e., the aristocratic samurai, have lost again, he looks literally and figuratively down at the farmers. When he explains that it is they who have won—in the sense that they have survived, that their kind will always survive—he turns to the four warrior graves and looks up at them. The glorious fighters can be looked up to even in death. Yet all the samurai, dead or alive, are losers: the heroic age yields to the age of the common man. Though the spirit of those noble dead is more exalted than the very flesh of these living nonentities, it is for the nonentities that the heroes gave their lives. Even if the last words proclaim the defeat and passage of grandeur from the earth, the samurai's music—their spirit, their memory—supersedes that of the peasants. It is a deeply ambivalent ending across which, significantly, the wind blows up dust. The wind, the cosmos, continues indifferent to peasant and samurai, survivor and casualty, human life and death. Is the end all bleakness then, or is there hope in that wind stirring among the graves? Remember Paul Valéry's *Le Cimetière marin: "Le vent se lève! . . . Il faut tenter de vivre!"*

This ambivalence, or ambiguity, created by the interplay of word

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and image can occur just as easily in a great comic film. Consider the ending of Fellini's *The White Sheik*. The newlyweds, Ivan and Wanda, have become reconciled and are about to be rushed off with a large group of tourists to a quick audience with the pope. Wanda assures Ivan that her dalliance with her dream hero, The White Sheik, was platonic; she has remained "pure and innocent." Ivan is vastly relieved, and both young simpletons cry for joy. Through her sobs, Wanda tells Ivan: "Now . . . *you* are my White Sheik." All would be well if Ivan did not catch his bride's face lighting up as she looks in another direction. But Ivan's worry is allayed when he sees what Wanda is looking at: the statue of an angel atop the colonnade. As the pair are marched off on the double, there is a closing long shot of the piazza in front of St. Peter's, the procession climbing up the steps to the papal audience, and the statue of the angel. What, then, do Wanda's last words mean: "Now . . .*you* are my White Sheik"? Has Wanda given up her romantic fantasies to accept her funny-looking husband as her hero? Then why, as she says them, does she look up beatifically at another creature of fantasy? Perhaps Wanda's schoolgirl romanticism is incurable—even the fact that she clings to the term "White Shiek" may substantiate this. But perhaps the angel is only a symbol of Wanda's childlike innocence; and calling a homely husband "White Sheik," the sincerest tribute of love.

Suggestive ambiguity, however, is only one of many ways in which the word, the literate word, makes its contribution to the cinema. Let us recall that desideratum on which Alexandre Astruc put his finger in the already mentioned "Caméra-Stylo" essay: "The fundamental problem of the cinema is how to express thought." And so I ask you to consider that in becoming talkies, the movies did not merely learn how to speak, they also began to learn how to think. No doubt, certain simple ideas could be expressed through images alone, but let us not fool ourselves into believing that the thought content of, for example, *Intolerance* or *The Battleship Potemkin* even approaches that of, say, *The Rules of the Game, The Children of Paradise, L'Avventura,* or *Winter Light*. Still, the spoken language of the cinema need not be of a highly intellectual or belletristic sort; what is certain, though, is that it is the best means of expressing thought. Words are, in fact, the appropriate accompaniment for one of the finest and most important things the film has to offer: the closeup. A closeup, to be sure, can be accompanied by mere silence, or just background music, or certain significant

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sounds, and still be enormously effective. But the most natural, expressive, and profound coupling available to film is the expressions of the human face seen in infinitesimal detail combined with what that face, or head, is saying. Or, if the lips are not moving as we hear the words, what that head is thinking. Yet even before cinematic words acquire meaning, they are a human voice, and, as Jean Renoir asked in *My Life and My Films,* "Is not the human voice the best means of conveying the personality of a human being?" It is a two-way street: not only does the voice combined with what it is saying comment on the face, but also, as Béla Balázs long ago reminded us in his *Theory of the Film,* "the mute play of the features" can make us realize in the middle of a character's discourse "the difference between this [mute] soliloquy and the audible conversation."

It is a well-known fact that most silent-screen acting was exaggerated: excessive gesturing and mugging, indeed posturing, in an attempt to compensate for the missing words. This became particularly offensive in the closeup, when delicate, subtle, or nascent and inchoate feelings had to be conveyed by overexplicitness. Such overstatement obviously worked best in farce, melodrama, and spectacle, and that may well be why these genres came to dominate the silent screen. Even the best attempts to get beyond these genres—for example, Murnau's *Sunrise*—were doomed to look like farce and sentimental melodrama, partly because the acting style dictated the basic characterizations of the actors, and partly because silent scriptwriters had to deal in broad, sweeping strokes and simple, elemental themes. It is highly probable that what makes film suspect in certain quarters to this day, what makes even certain film reviewers wonder whether it is really an art, has to do with its having begun as a medium condemned to primitivism by its lack of sound. Today's prejudice was yesterday a plausible judgment.

Still, most contemporary advocates of pure cinema would not go so far as to wish to throw out sound altogether. Even a film like Antonioni's lamentable *The Passenger,* whose climactic sequences have either no dialogue or the barest minimum, contains other scenes full of verbiage, highflown and ludicrous as it may be. So I wonder what measures they have in mind when they insist on the lesser importance of dialogue: how would they want to delimit its scope and keep it in its subservient role? The two manifest ways in

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which you can keep dialogue down are to make it sparse or to make it worse. By worse, as I see it, they would mean less literary, less noticeable. This is plainly correct in some cases. In Stanley Kubrick's *2001*, where one of the points is the contrast between mankind's tremendously expanded horizons and its obsolete, bureaucratic and constricting vocabulary, the flattening out of language is a legitimate—though still, I insist, literary—device. Again, a film about very simple folk or taciturn professional soldiers rightly eschews Jamesian or Wildean dialogue. But even films about tight-lipped private eyes, for instance, profit appreciably when the tight-lipped dialogue comes out of Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett.

I must content myself here with one example of the difference the quality of language can make when all other elements are as nearly as possible alike. There is a moment in Ingmar Bergman's latest film, *Face to Face,* when the young woman psychiatrist, played by Liv Ullmann, who has been hospitalized after an unsuccessful suicide attempt, exclaims from her bed to her solicitous doctor friend and quasi-lover, played by Erland Josephson: "Do you think I'm crippled for the rest of my life? Do you think we're a vast army of emotionally crippled wretches wandering about calling to one another with words we don't understand and which only make us even more afraid?" The switch from the first person singular to the first person plural in this *de profundis* constitutes the simplest way of showing the uncertain boundaries between personal failure and universal collapse. In Bergman's preceding film, *Scenes from a Marriage,* the closing sequence has Ullmann and Josephson married and in bed together. Only they are no longer married to each other, as they once were, but to new partners; and even this bed they share as sporadic lovers belongs to some distant acquaintance. A nightmare has awakened Marianne in the middle of the night and leads to an intimate conversation with her ex-husband: "Johan!—Yes, my dear.—Do you think we're living in utter confusion?—You and I?—No, the whole lot of us." The conversation gropes along in the dark for a while, then Marianne asks again: "Johan . . . —Yes?—Have we missed something important?—All of us?—You and I." The scene is incomparably more affecting than its counterpart in *Face to Face,* yet the device used in the dialogue is a distinctly literary one: incremental repetition, derived from poetry and consisting of a refrain that is not repeated verbatim, but with some

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small yet significant variation. Here the refrain is reversed: a universal *we* is first mistaken for a personal one; then, with almost identical diction, a private *we* is mistaken for a generalization. The effect—call it literary or cinematic—is a powerful *rapprochement* of the problems of the principal characters with those of people everywhere.

And what about the question of quantity? Is dialogue, in the interest of good filmmaking, to be used only sparingly? The dialogue in some of the world's great films is not only highly literate but also profuse. The just quoted *Scenes from a Marriage* is a case in point; mind you, the English subtitles, copious as they are, represent extensive and not always judicious pruning of the Swedish. But almost all of Bergman's films have at least long sequences brimful of words; take only the magnificent scene in *Winter Light* where Ingrid Thulin speaks the letter Gunnar Björnstrand is reading. The camera is stationary, Thulin barely moves her face, and there is only one cutaway from the relentless closeup. But there are torrents of words. Yet, for me, this is one of the most moving scenes in cinema, closely followed by other Bergmanian monologues delivered by his marvelous actresses.

And what of the burstingly verbal screenplays of Jacques Prévert (notably that for *The Children of Paradise*), rightly adduced by Orson Welles, in the already quoted interview, as pinnacles of French filmmaking; or of the other extremely "talky" French films, like those of Pagnol, Duvivier, and many others? Consider a film like *Monsieur Vincent,* the only successful filmed hagiography, which owes so much more to Jean Anouilh's prodigally articulate scenario than to Maurice Cloche's decent but conventional direction. In Eastern Europe especially, words often seem to tumble off the screen in heaps; I mention only three emblematic directors: the Hungarian István Szabó, the Pole Andrzej Wajda, the Czechoslovak Hynek Bočan. The American screwball comedies of the thirties, one of Hollywood's most satisfying achievements, depended as much on the non-stop verbal wit of their writers as on the charm of their actors. What, for instance, do we remember of *The Philadelphia Story*? Certainly not the *mise en scène*, but Hepburn and Grant and the bright rataplan of their crackling exchanges. Yet good, abundant dialogue works not only in comedy; though atmosphere, acting and direction were all exquisite in David Lean's *Brief Encounter,* it is the eminently verbal screenplay of Noël Coward that kept the sentimental story on its consistently dignified level.

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But rather than multiply examples let me close with one last remark from Ingmar Bergman to the editors of *Chaplin*: "Whatever is visible or audible—image and sound—that's what affects me most." And that, I think, when combined artfully by a master filmmaker, is also what affects us most.

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Poems by Ghalib

Twenty *ghazals*

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in collaboration with

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

In the Balance

The cold came. It has photographed the scene
With so exact a care, that you can look
From field-white and from wood-black to the air
Now that the snow has ceased, and catch no shade
Except these three—the third is the sky's grey:
Will it thicken or thaw, this rawness menacing?
The sky stirs: the sky refuses to say:
But it lets new colour in: its thinning smoke
Opens towards 'a region beyond snow,
Rifts to a blueness rather than a blue:
Brought to a sway, the whole day hesitates
Through the sky of afternoon, and you beneath,
As if questions of weather were of life and death.

Below Tintern

The river's mirrorings remake a world
  Green to the cliff-tops, hanging
Wood by wood, towards its counterpart:
  Green gathers there as no green could
That water did not densen. Yet why should mind
  So eagerly swim down and through
Such towering dimness? Because that world seems true?
  And yet it could not, if it were
Suspend more solid castles in the air.
  Machicolations, look-outs for mind's eye
Feed and free it with mere virtuality
  Where the images elude us. For they are true enough
Set wide with invitation where they lie
  Those liquid thresholds, that inverted sky
Gripped beneath rockseams by the valley verdure,
  Lost to reflection as the car bends by.

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Embassy

A breeze keeps fleshing the flag:
  I watch it droop, then reassemble
On air an emblem I do not know:
  Nor does that woman know the part
She plays in this rhymescheme that no art
  Has prompted: for the breeze begins
Feeling along the dyed silk of her hair,
  Unfurling its viking platinum to the same
Rhythm with which the flag bursts into flame:
  Steam seeps from a manhole in the asphalt:
And that, too, leans to the common current,
  Goes upward taking shape from the unseen
In this unpremeditable action where
  A wind is having its way with all swayable things,
Combing through flag and steam, streaming-out hair.

The Metamorphosis

Bluebells come crowding a fellside
  A stream once veined. It rises
Like water again where, bell on bell,
  They flow through its bed, each rope
And rivulet, each tributary thread
  Found-out by flowers. And not the slope
Alone, runs with this imaginary water:
  Marshes and pools of it stay
On the valley-floor, fed (so the eye would say)
  From the same store and streamhead.
Like water, too, this blueness not all blue
  Goes ravelled with groundshades, grass and stem,
As the wind dishevels and strokes it open;
  So that the mind, in salutory confusion,
Surrendering up its powers to the illusion,
  Could, swimming in metamorphoses, believe
Water itself might move like a flowing of flowers.

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The Scar

That night, the great tree split
  Where it forked, and a full half lay
At morning, prone by the other
  To await decay. The scar
Of cleavage gleams along the trunk
  With such a tall and final whiteness,
It is the living tree seems dead
  That rears from its own done life
Preparing to put on leaf. Buds
  Bead and soon the leaves will cover
That sapless-seeming wintershape all over.
  A debris clings there and claws
At the tree-foot, spills out
  Up half a hill in bone-white antlerings:
Over it all, the scar glints down,
  And a spring light pulsating ashen,
You would swear that through the shuddered trunk
  Still tremors the memory of its separation.

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HOWARD MOSS

Three Sisters

"Loneliness is a terrible thing, Andrei."

In Three Sisters, the inability to act becomes the action of the play. How to make stasis dramatic is its problem and Chekhov solves it by a gradual deepening of insight rather than by the play of event. The grandeur of great gestures and magnificent speeches remains a Shakespearian possibility—a diminishing one. Most often, we get to know people through the accretion of small details—minute responses, tiny actions, little gauze screens being lifted in the day-to-day pressure of relationships. In most plays, action builds toward a major crisis. In *Three Sisters,* it might be compared to the drip of a faucet in a water basin; a continuous process wears away the enamel of facade.

Many stories are being told simultaneously: the stories of the four Prozorov orphans—three girls, one boy, grown up in varying degrees—living in one of those Chekhovian provincial towns that have the literal detail of a newspaper story but keep drifting off into song. There is the old drunken doctor, Chebutykin, once in love with the Prozorovs' mother, there is a slew of battery officers stationed in the town—one of them, Vershinin, a married man, falls in love with the already married middle-sister, Masha; another proposes to the youngest, Irena; and still a third, Soliony, also declares his love for her. There is Olga, the oldest sister, and Kulighin, Masha's awkward schoolteacher husband, and there is Natasha, the small town girl who sets her heart on Andrei, the brother. It is Natasha's and Andrei's marriage that provides the catalyst of change. Each of these characters might be conceived as a voice entering the score at intervals to announce or to develop its subject, to join and part in various combinations: duets, trios, and so on. *Three Sisters* is the most musical of all of Chekhov's plays in construction, the one that depends most heavily on the repetition of motifs. And it uses music throughout: marching bands, hummed tunes, "the faint sound of an accordion coming from the street," a guitar, a piano, the human voice raised in song.

Yet too much can be made of the "music" of the play at the

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expense of its command of narrative style. Private confrontation and social conflict are handled with equal authority, and a symbolism still amateur in *The Seagull,* written five years earlier, has matured and gone underground to permeate the texture of the work. No dead bird is brought onstage weighted with meaning. No ideas are embalmed in objects. What we have instead is a kind of geometric structure, one angle of each story fitting into the triangular figure of another, and, overlaying that, a subtle web of connected images and words. Seemingly artless, it is made of steel. In a letter to his sister, Chekhov complained, "I find it very difficult to write *Three Sisters,* much more difficult than any of my other plays." One can well believe it.

Because immobility is the subject—no other play catches hold of the notion so definitively with the exception of *Hamlet*—secondary characters carry the burden of narration forward. Natasha and Andrei establish the main line of construction; their marriage is the network to which everything else attaches. Yet Andrei never spins the wheels of action. That task is left to Natasha, a character originally outside the immediate family, and to another stranger to the domestic circle, Soliony. One a provincial social climber, the other a neurotic captain, each takes on, in time, an ultimate coloration: Natasha, the devouring wife, Soliony, the lethal friend.

Natasha's motives are obvious enough to be disarming—disarming in its literal sense: to deprive one of weapons. No one need *suspect* her of the worst; her lies are so transparent that every civilized resource is called upon to deal with the transparency rather than the lie.

Soliony lacks accessible motivation but is easily recognizable as a true creature from life. Panicky and literal, he is repellent—one of the few repellent characters Chekhov ever created. If Soliony is shy, shyness is dangerous. Instinct, not insight leads him to the weak spot in other people. A deeply wounded man who has turned into a weapon, he is a member of a species: the seducer-duelist, a nineteenth-century stock character Chekhov manages to twist into a perverse original.

When Irena rejects him, he says he will kill anyone who wins her; and in the name of affection, he makes good his threat. Ironically, Irena's half-hearted relationship to Tuzenbach becomes the fatal rivalry of the play; Tuzenbach has won Irena's hand but not her heart. Moreover, Soliony is introduced into the Prozorov circle by Tuzenbach, who therefore begins the chain of events leading to his own death.

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Nothing redeems Soliony except the barbarity of his manner, a symptom of an alienation deep enough, perhaps, to evoke pity. A person who cannot feel pleasure and destroys everyone else's, his touchy uneasiness is irrational, the punishment it exacts inexhaustible. Unwilling to be mollified by life's niceties or won over by its distractions, he is a definite negative force in a play in which a lack of energy is crucial. Natasha turned inside-out, a killer without her affectations and pieties, he is, if never likeable, at least not a liar. He tells us several times that, even to him, the scent he uses fails to disguise the smell of a dead man. That stench rises from a whole gallery of literary soldiers. No matter how heroic a military man may be, he is, functionally, a murderer. Soliony reminds us of that easily forgotten fact; he is the gunman of the play.

And the gunshot in *Three Sisters* is fired offstage—a shot heard before in *Ivanov, The Seagull,* and *The Wood Demon.* In *Uncle Vanya,* the shots occur *on*stage; half-farcical, they are not without psychological danger. Vanya shoots out of humiliation; his failure to hit anything only deepens it. The offstage gunshot in *Three Sisters* does more than end Tuzenbach's life and destroy Irena's marriage. A final fact, it leaves in its wake a slowly emerging revelation, the dark edge of an outline: the black side of Irena.

In the scene just preceding the shot, Tuzenbach makes a crucial request. Irena has described herself earlier as a locked piano to which she has lost the key.

> TUZENBACH: I was awake all night. Not that there's anything to be afraid of in my life, nothing's threatening . . . Only the thought of that lost key torments me and keeps me awake. Say something to me . . . (*A pause.*) Say something!
> IRENA: What? What am I to say? What?
> TUZENBACH: Anything.

Tuzenbach, about to fight a duel with Soliony, needs Irena's reassurance. Forced to obscure a fact while trying to express an emotion, he says ". . . nothing's threatening . . ." He is telling a lie, and unaware of his true situation, Irena can hardly be blamed for not understanding its desperateness. And there is something odd about Tuzenbach's request in the first place: he already knows Irena doesn't love him and is hoping against hope for a last reprieve. The inability to bare or face emotional realities—a favorite Chekhovian notion—is only partly in question here; here there is something worse: to feel the demand but not the attraction. For even if Irena understood Tuzenbach's request, her response, if

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honest, would have to be equivocal. They are both guilty; he for demanding love where he knows it doesn't exist, she for not loving. He is asking too much; she is offering too little.

Tuzenbach's request echoes almost exactly the one Katya makes to the Professor at the end of "A Dreary Story," where it is met with the same failure:

> "Help me, help me!" she begs. "I can't stand anymore . . ."
> "There's nothing I can say, Katya . . ."
> I am at a loss, embarrassed, moved by her sobbing, and I can hardly stand.
> "Let's have lunch, Katya," I say with a forced smile. "And stop that crying. I shall soon be dead, Katya," I at once add in a low voice.
> "Just say one word, just one word!" she cries, holding out her hands.

Katya seems as impervious to the Professor's death sentence as he is to her despair. Each is too full of his own suffering. The characters in *Three Sisters,* like Katya and the Professor, do not hear each other's pleas, partly out of selfishness—other people's troubles are boring—partly out of self-protection. If they *did* hear them, what could they do?

Needs, revealed but never satisfied, drive Chekhov's characters toward two kinds of action: the deranged—Vanya's hysterical outbursts, Treplev's suicide—or flight. They desert each other—as Katya deserts the Professor half a page after the dialogue above, and as Trigorin abandons Nina in *The Seagull*. Nothing could be more Chekhovian than the last sentence of "A Dreary Story." The Professor, watching Katya go, wonders if she'll turn around and look back at him for the last time. She doesn't. Then he says to himself, "Goodbye, my treasure."—end of story. But those three words are endlessly and ambiguously illuminating. Does he love Katya? Is she his treasure because this is the last feeling he will ever have? Is this final desertion the one symptom of his being human? Is there a tiny sarcastic twinge to "treasure?" In regard to people, every credible truth is only partial.

The inability to respond evokes responses: coldness, hatred, contempt. Loneliness can be viewed as humiliation and misfortune as insult. What cannot be given is interpreted as being withheld. The wrong people always love each other—bad luck or the telltale sign of a fundamental incapacity to love. The typical Chekhovian character longs for what he can neither express nor have, and each unrequited wish is one more dream in a universal nightmare. If the

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great treachery lies in the disparity between what we feel and what we say, between what we want and what we get, do we have—through an unconscious perversity—a vested interest in disparity itself? Proust, the ultimate dissector of jealousy, thought so, and it is odd to think that Chekhov, working with such different material and in such a different way, may have come to a similar conclusion. The truth is that what is interesting about love is how it doesn't work out, and Proust and Chekhov saw that truth and that interest from different angles. Surprisingly, like Proust in *Remembrance of Things Past,* who provides us with not one example of a happy marriage in over 4,000 pages, Chekhov offers us none either.

And both Proust and Chekhov concern themselves with a social class that is about to be overwhelmed by forces rising from below. In Proust, the class distinctions are clear; we know exactly who is noble, and who is middle-class. We have to, because the impingement of one upon the other is one of the themes of the novel. That certainty eludes us in Chekhov's case. Olga, Masha, and Irena belong to a social class that has no counterpart in America. We see them as a kind of provincial nobility (partly because we have got to them so often through English accents) whereas they represent the lowest rung of a rural aristocracy, a sort of down-at-the-heels upper middle-class living in the country: squires going to seed, a gentry saddled with land that no longer interests them, fitful leftovers unable to cope with the unfamiliar and the new. Chekhov's plays suffer from classlessness in translation, and more than classlessness in certain productions: maids become heroines and stable boys stars. The main difficulty is: One can hardly imagine Irena in Kansas, say, stretching her hands toward an imaginary New York. She would have already been there, traveling by jet. And, in *The Seagull,* would anyone have the faintest notion of just what *kind* of bank Madame Arkadina kept her much-discussed securities in?

But power, as a source, is general no matter the specific version, and both Natasha and Soliony are interested in it. Each is allowed to inherit a particular world: domestic tyranny in Natasha's case, the completed fantasy of the romantic egoist in Soliony's: the destruction of the rival lover. The passivity of the others gives them permission, it invites them in.

An embittered fact-monger, Soliony is unable to respond to any shade of irony. And though Irena is too young to know it, to be literal and humorless—qualities equally at home in the romantic and the dullard—can be as poisonous as deception or ingrained

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meanness. Worldliness is never an issue in *Three Sisters* though it might well be. Vershinin brings a breath of it in the door with him with his arrival, but it is the weary urbanity of a disappointed middle-aged man. A lack of worldliness in people forced to live in the world is always a potential source of suffering. Those people doomed to love late and to be ultimately denied it, like Masha and Vershinin, arrive at it by way of lost opportunities and through a web of feeling. In *Three Sisters,* we get two warped versions of it: Natasha's grasping selfishness and the doctor's cynicism. They are the merest echoes of the real thing. What we have in its place is innocence on the one hand and frustration on the other. There is no wise man in the play for the others to turn to; there is no mother and father for children who remain children, though they walk about as if they were adults, to run to for comfort and advice. In Chekhov's view, even worldliness, we suspect, would be another inadequate means of dealing with life, as powerless as innocence to fend off its evils, and, because it comes in the guise of wisdom, perhaps the most deceptive of all.

It is not always clear in various editions of the play that these revelations occur over a period of five years. We watch Irena, in fact, change from a young girl into a woman. The time scheme is relatively long, the roles are enigmatically written and need to be played with the finest gradations in order to develop their true flavors and poisons. If Natasha is immediately recognizable as evil, or Soliony as the threat of the play, a great deal is lost in characterization and suspense. Irena's cry of "Moscow! . . . Moscow!" at the end of the second act should be a note in a scale, not a final sounding. She has not realized, she is *beginning* to realize that what she hopes for will remain a dream.

Compared to *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya,* a technical advance occurs in *Three Sisters* that may account for a greater sounding of the depths. Chekhov's mastery of the techniques of playwriting may be measured by his use of the gun; it is farther offstage here than before—not in the next room but at the edge of town, which suggests that it might, finally, be dispensed with, as it is in *The Cherry Orchard,* where the only sound we hear, ultimately, is an ax cutting down trees. As he went on, Chekhov let go of the trigger, his one concession to the merciless demands of the stage. The gunshot in *Three Sisters,* unlike the shot in *Vanya,* is terminal. But Tuzenbach's death has further implications; it is partly the result of, and

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the price paid for Irena's lack of love. Something suicidal colors Tuzenbach's death, and we pick it up in his last big speech:

> TUZENBACH: . . . Really, I feel quite elated. I feel as if I were seeing those fir-trees and maples and birches for the first time in my life. They all seem to be looking at me with a sort of inquisitive look and waiting for something. What beautiful trees—and how beautiful, when you think of it, life ought to be with trees like these!
>
> (*Shouts of 'Ah-oo! Heigh–ho'! are heard.*)
>
> I must go, it's time . . . Look at that dead tree, it's all dried-up, but it's still swaying in the wind along with the others. And in the same way, it seems to me that, if I die, I shall still have a share in life somehow or other. Goodbye, my dear . . . (*Kisses her hands.*) Your papers, the ones you gave me, are on my desk, under the calendar.

Tuzenbach never had much of "a share in life"; he has always been a "dried-up [tree] . . . swaying in the wind. . . ." If Irena had been able to love him, would he have tried to talk to Soliony or to Dr. Chebutykin and in some way mediated the pointlessness of this ending? A pointlessness equally vivid, one suspects, whether he had married Irena or not.

The key to Irena's heart, that locked piano, is lost. Neither Tuzenbach nor Soliony ever had it. So their duel, though in deadly earnest, turns out to be an ironic, even a ludicrous footnote. Who holds the key to Irena's heart? Someone offstage—like the gun—whom she hopes to meet in Moscow. "The right one" is how she describes him, the unmeetable ideal who dominates the fantasies of schoolgirls. The doctor may comfort himself with bogus philosophy and claim that nothing matters but the others tend to confirm not his thesis but its perverse corollary. By the indecisiveness of their actions, by their inability to deal head-on with what is central to their lives, they make, in the end, what matters futile. They unwittingly prove Dr. Chebutykin's false notion: what *does* Tuzenbach's death matter? Would Irena be any more lonely with him than without him? Would he have been content living with someone who doesn't love him, he who needs love to make himself feel loveable? Would Irena have joined him in "work"—her idealized version of it—and now be working alone? At what? Reality intrudes upon a pipe dream, but even the reality is dreamlike. The Baron's sacrifice does little for the cause of either work or love.

Of the three sisters, Olga is the least interesting: nothing romantic attaches to her. She is neither unhappily married nor unhappily

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*un*married. A person of feeling who has suppressed or never felt the pull of the irrational, she is the substitute mother or the spinster-mother—a recognizable type for whom the traditional role is the aunt, boringly earnest but secretly admirable. She represents a standard of behavior unwillingly, almost painfully, for her nerves are not equal to the moral battles in which she must take part, yet those very nerves are the barometric instruments that register ethical weather. Two sets of values are in conflict in *Three Sisters* as well as two social classes, and nothing makes those values clearer than Olga's and Natasha's confrontation over Anfisa, the 80-year-old nurse. To Olga, Anfisa deserves the respect accorded the old and the faithful. Natasha uses Anfisa as another means of enforcing a pecking order whose main function is to make her status visible. She demands that Anfisa stand up in her presence like a soldier at attention. In this clash of feelings and wills, Olga doesn't defend Anfisa as she should: in true opposition, in attack. She is too stunned, too hurt. She says, ". . . everything went black." Natasha, out to win, wins in spite of what would ordinarily be a great drawback—her affair with Poptopopov. Even her open-faced adultery, commented upon by the doctor in the third act, doesn't undercut her position. People prefer to ignore her rather than precipitate a series of crises whose logical end could only be an attack on Andrei. And Andrei cannot be attacked. Affection, pity, and, most of all, necessity are his three shields. Natasha has found the perfect nest to despoil. Andrei was always too weak, too self-centered, in spite of his shyness, to guard his sisters' interests. Now he is not only weak; he is torn.

But Olga is too morally good to let Natasha's rudeness to Anfisa pass without protest—as so many other instances have passed: Natasha's request for Irena's room, made both to Irena and Andrei, for instance, which is met with a kind of cowed acquiescence. It is a demand so basically impossible that no immediate way of dealing with it comes to hand. Natasha apologizes to Olga but it is an apology without understanding, without heart. Actually, it is motivated by Natasha's fear that she has revealed too much, gone too far. Finally, Olga removes Anfisa from the household. There is a tiny suite for her at the school where Olga becomes headmistress, a place where Anfisa may stay for the rest of her life. It is easier—and wiser, too—to get out than to go on fighting a battle already lost. But whether the existence of that suite sways Olga in her decision to *become* a headmistress is left hanging.

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Though Natasha and Soliony are the movers and the shakers of the play, another neurotic character, invisible throughout, is a spur to its conflicts: Vershinin's suicidal fishwife of a mate, whom he fears, comes to detest, and yet who controls his life. He is weak, too, unable to make a clean break with his own misery. Chekhov points up one of the strangest true facts of emotional life: nothing binds people closer together than mutual unhappiness. And that is why Chekhov is sometimes so funny. The very horrors of people's lives—short of poverty and disease—are also the most ludicrous things about them. Vanya with a gun! How sad! Yet everyone laughs. The absurd and the tragic are uncomfortably close. Like the figure of the clown, and the wit in black humor, Chekhov teeters on a seesaw. Even a suggestion of the excessive would be ruinous. One gunshot too many, one sob prolonged a second longer than necessary and we have crossed over to the other side. Chekhov, to be played properly, has to be played on a hairline.

Vershinin's mirror-image is Masha, the most interesting of the three sisters, an interest dramatically mysterious because we know so little about her. But we know she is a woman of temperament, a woman capable of passion—and that in itself distinguishes her from Olga, to whom something of the old maid clings, just as something of the ingenue mars Irena. Masha wears black throughout the play, reminding us of her namesake, Masha Shamrayev, in *The Seagull*, who also always wears black because she is "in mourning for my life." (It may be of some interest to note that, in the same play, Madame Arkadina's first name is Irena.)

Masha is the onlooker who comments or withholds comment, often to devastating effect. She is the one free-speaker of the play. She tells us the truth about Natasha from the beginning, if only by implication; as a matter of fact, she tells us the truth about everything, even herself, blurting out the facts to her unwilling listeners, Olga and Irena, who don't want to hear of her love for Vershinin, don't want to be involved in a family betrayal. If adultery is a black mark against the detested Natasha, what must one make of it with the beloved Masha? The categories begin to blur, the certainties become uncertain. Like a lot of truth tellers, Masha is morally impeccable in regard to honesty but something of a menace; she puts people in impossible positions. She is the romantic heart of the play just as Irena is the romantic lead. Unlike Irena, Masha is a lover disillusioned by life, not deluded by it. She married her schoolmaster when she was a young student and bitterly learns that

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the man who struck her as superior is at heart a fool. The reigning intelligence of the play is Masha's. It might have been the doctor's if intelligence were not so dangerous a gift for a man who has taught himself to be disingenuous.

Masha is still something of an impulsive child, a far different thing from being an adolescent like Irena, or living a self-imposed second childhood like the doctor, whose drunken dream is to make second childhood permanent. Masha isn't interested in intelligence *per se* and the doctor can't afford to be. If he ever let himself know what he knows, it would destroy him. And so he protects himself by a kind of slow-motion destruction, infinitely easier to handle. He keeps telling us how impossible it is to bear reality in a play in which everyone else keeps saying how impossible it is to know what reality is.

In spite of a loveless marriage (from *her* point of view), Masha has Kulighin who, for all his absurdity, has something everyone else lacks: a true position. Too emasculated to oppose Masha's affair with Vershinin, he nevertheless loves her, sticks by her, and would be desperate without her. A stuffed shirt, a mollycoddle, a bower and a scraper, his ridiculousness masks the genuine feelings of a boy—he loves out of dependency but who else is able to love in *Three Sisters*? Masha, yes, but her love is romantic; Irena, no, *because* her love is romantic. Kulighin ends up with something: he may wander about the stage calling for Masha who never seems to be there, but he has the *right* to call her, and knows she will go home with him in the end. She has nowhere else to go.

The three marriages in the play—Masha-Kulighin, Vershinin and his offstage wife, and Natasha-Andrei—are all unhappy. Strangely, Masha and Kulighin do not have children, and no mention is ever made of their childlessness. A matter of no significance, it seems, yet it becomes important in regard to Natasha, for it is through the cardinal bourgeois virtue of motherhood that she manipulates the household. Masha provides no counterweight. A subterranean notion percolates at the lowest level of *Three Sisters*—moral righteousness as the chief disguise of self-interest. Power is consolidated under the smoke screen of moral urgency. The Dreyfus Affair, the Reichstag fire, and Watergate are extensions of the same basic principle. Natasha's emotions are as false as her values. Under the camouflage of maternal love, she gains possession of Irena's room and has the maskers dismissed. Whatever *she* may

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think, it is clear to us that what motivates her action is not her love for her children but her love for herself.

And something similar may be said of Soliony. The duel, though illegal, was a process by which men of Soliony's day still settled matters of honor too refined or too personal for the courts. But it was also a vehicle for machismo pride hidden in the trappings of a gentleman's code. Emotional illness has never found a better front than ethical smugness.

In contrast to the Prozorovs as we first see them, and in spite of her malevolence, Natasha is creating a true family, one with a real mother, father, and children, where only a semblance of family life had existed before. The ghosts of family attachments haunt the wanderers crossing the thresholds of rooms, as if they were searching for a phrase impossible to recall, or had fixed their eyes on an invisible figure. The word "orphan" rings its bell. And Natasha, carrying the energetic serum of the new, has only one goal: to possess a material world. Starting out as a girl who doesn't even know how to dress, she ends up as an unwitting domestic servant of change, dusting a corner here, tearing down a cobweb there. Not one of these acts has a generous motive. She is only a force for progress by being lower class and on the move. She thinks of herself as the mistress of a house that had for too long been in disorder without her. And in a certain sense, that view is not irrational. Two questions that can never be answered are asked *sotto voce* in the play: What would have happened to everyone if Andrei hadn't married Natasha? And: What will Andrei's and Natasha's children be like?

But even Natasha is up against something too subtle to control. Conquerors have their opposites—losers. But Natasha is working not in a house of losers but of survivors. Something too lively makes Chekhov's characters, even the desperate ones, convincing candidates for yet another day of hopes and dreams. One feels their mortality less than their indestructability. Everyone casts the shadow of age ahead; it is hard to think of anyone dying in a Chekhov play who isn't actually killed during the action. Some predisposition to live, some strain of the *type* transfixes the individual into permanent amber, so that, unheroic as they may be, we think of them somewhat in the way we think of Shakespearian heroes. They may languish in life but they refuse to die in art, and with a peculiar insistence—an irony only good plays manage to achieve because it is only on the stage that the human figure is

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always wholly represented and representative. When we speak of "Masha" or "Vanya," we are already talking about the future. One of the side-effects of masterpieces is to make their characters as immortal as the works in which they appear. And so Natasha is stuck among her gallery-mates forever, always *about* to take over the house.

And she is about to do so by exploiting bourgeois morality for ugly ends—an old story. But the subject is the key to Chekhov's method here: the business of unmasking. The soldiers' uniforms hide the same boring civilians underneath. It is important for Tuzenbach literally to take off his clothes and become a civilian "so plain" that Olga cries when she first sees him. Natasha's sash is a tiny repetition of this motif when she reverses roles and comments on Irena's belt in the last act, a bit of signaling uncharacteristic of Chekhov who rarely stoops to a device so crude. It is already clear that the outsider of Act I has become the dominating power of the household.

Unfulfilled wishes allow for seemingly random duets that enrich the texture of the play by showing us major characters in minor relationships—psychological side pockets of a sort that cast desperate or ironic lights. Olga and Kulighin, for instance, in their discussion of marriage defend it as an institution and as a source of happiness. Yet Olga is a spinster and Kulighin a cuckold. Both schoolteachers, they are drawn together by their profession and by a kind of innocent idealism that overrides fact and disappointment. Theirs might have been the only happy marriage in the play, and Kulighin says he often thinks if he hadn't married Masha, he would have married Olga. In the face of adultery, alcoholism, compulsive gambling, irrational rage, and attempted suicide, Olga still believes in the "finer things," in the vision of human goodness.

Similarly, Irena and Dr. Chebutykin are connected by a thread of sympathy and habit—the oldest and the youngest in one another's arms, each equally deluded, alcohol fuzzing the facts for the doctor, and the determined unawareness of youth providing Irena with a temporary protective barrier. These uneasy alliances are touching because they rise out of needs that bear little relation to their satisfactions. It is precisely Kulighin's marriage to Masha that makes Olga more deeply aware she is a spinster; it is Chebutykin's drinking and his smashing of her mother's clock that will finally curdle Irena's affection for him. And this kind of delicate interplay

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between the loving and the hateful aspects of relationships is reenforced often by the action of the play itself. It is Chebutykin, for example, who is the Baron's second at the duel in which Irena is deprived of her husband-to-be, her one chance of making a bid for another life. Trusted by the Baron, Chebutykin has some reason for hoping the Baron is killed—namely, to protect the continuation of his relationship to Irena. If that is true, there is a further irony: the doctor doesn't realize that he has already put that relationship in serious jeopardy. And then there are relationships by omission: Andrei's outpourings to the deaf servant Ferapont, Masha never addressing a single word to Natasha throughout the entire course of the play. Masha—like her creator—makes the inarticulate eloquent.

The random duets are complemented by a series of trios. Two are obvious: Masha-Kulighin-Vershinin and Irena-Tuzenbach-Soliony. But a third is not: Chebutykin's ambiguous relationship to Irena provides her with an underground suitor; his is one of those fatherly-grandfatherly roles whose sexual, affectionate, and narcissistic aspects are impossible to unravel, and he places himself in position as a member of a male trio: Tuzenbach-Soliony-Chebutykin. The doctor has a claim on Irena; he was her protector in the past; she is his lifeline now. It is through the subtle shifts of Irena's relationship to Chebutykin that we watch Irena grow from an unknowing girl into a woman who is beginning to see the truth. Chebutykin is onstage, but by being a kind of subliminal lover, he brings to mind, or to the back of the mind, three *off*stage characters essential to the conflicts of the play: Vershinin's wife; Natasha's lover, Protopopov; and the sisters' mother, each an invisible figure in a triangle. If Chebutykin was once in love with the Prozorovs' mother, he was part of an unacknowledged trio: the mother of the sisters, their father, and himself. The mother's image is kept alive in Irena who resembles her. These offstage-onstage love affairs—one of which we see, one of which we watch being covered up, and one of which we merely hear about—complicate the action and reenforce the play's design of interlocking triangles.

Irena is part of two other triangles, one onstage, one off. Our study in ingenuousness, an ingenuousness that will become educated before our eyes, she is joined to Second Lieutenant Fedotik and Rode by the enthusiasms and innocence of youth. If the play were a ballet, at some point they would have a divertissement to

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themselves. They isolate Chebutykin in a particular way: the contrast between their trio and the doctor makes time physically visible. And then Irena might be considered part of yet another triangle; her dreamed-of "someone" whom she hopes to meet in Moscow is as much of a threat to her happiness with Tuzenbach as Soliony is. It is he, in her mind, who holds the key to the locked piano. Overall, we have our fixed image of a trio, our superimposed stereotype: the three sisters themselves.

The themes of *Three Sisters,* the gulf between dream and action, between hope and disappointment, have finer variations. Even accepting the "real" is thwarted. Irena's compromise in marrying the Baron proves to be impossible. Having given up Moscow, Irena is not even allowed, so to speak, its drearier suburbs. She has met the fate that awaited her all along. Her cry of "work, work," echoed by Tuzenbach, is a hopeless cry. The issue is real, the solution false: What could a dreamy schoolgirl and a philosophical Baron contribute to a brickworks?

But something more than simple evasiveness frustrates the actors in *Three Sisters.* There is a grand plan working out its design, moving the players beyond their ability to act. And the military here perform a special function. When the battery is moved to Poland—its rumored destination was Siberia—the soldiers and officers reverse positions with the sisters who can never get to Moscow, the dreamland of easy solutions. The sisters are psychologically "stationed" in the house by a force as ineluctable as that which sends the soldiers on their way. The dispatchment of soldiers is an event inevitable in time. And illusion gathers strength in ratio to time: the longer an idea is believed the more powerful it becomes. "If we only knew," the sisters say at the end. "If we could only know . . ." Know what? Something already known—time moves people without their moving: the soldiers are forced to go, the sisters to stay. The object the doctor breaks in his drunkenness is a clock, and for good reason. Time's pervasiveness—its importance—is stressed many times in the play: the announcement of what time the maskers are to arrive; the hour set for the duel (at one point, the doctor takes out his hunting watch to verify it); the fifteen minutes Natasha allows herself on the sleigh ride with her lover; the no longer avoidable date on which Andrei's papers have to be signed; the very first scene, in fact, which is both an anniversary and a name day. As the minutes tick themselves off, action

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is always being performed, even by omission. Deluded into thinking time is eternal, events infinitely postponable, the sisters keep hoping problems will solve themselves, somehow, in time. They do, but not as a requital to hope. Birth and death, introduced in the anniversary-name day occasion of the first scene, are more sharply contrasted and connected in the last. Natasha's newest baby is wheeled back and forth in a carriage, a bit of counterpoint to Tuzenbach's death. In between, we have, simply, age—the eighty years of Anfisa's life.

Time sounds a recurrent note in *Three Sisters*; place is more subtly emphasized. The idea of a journey hovers in the air and charges the atmosphere—the journey never taken, the journey never to *be* taken. The repeated sounding of "Moscow!" is more than the never-to-be-reached Eldorado of the work or its lost Eden; it is a symbol of distance itself, that past or future in space from which the characters are forever barred. On this score, the play peculiarly divides itself on sexual grounds: the men want to stay, the women to go. Memory lures them in opposite directions, and Masha's halting bit of verse clues us in. What cannot be remembered takes on importance; it begins to have the force of a prediction in the same way that the unconscious, unable to bring significant material to the surface, determines future behavior. What does her verse mean? Where has she heard it? She says nothing for the first fifteen minutes of the play, she hums a little tune, remembers a line of verse she can't quite place. She has given up the piano. Enraged beyond speech, she feels—when we first see her—that any communication would be a betrayal. What Masha remembers most vividly, and whose betrayal she cannot forgive, is herself. Even music and poetry, because they evoke memory, are forms of conspiracy: they reveal the sensibility she has forfeited for the stupidity of the world she lives in.

The women want to go; more than that, they want to go *back*. Back to a life they once lived (they think), certainly not the one they are living. As for a brave new world, there are no explorers in *Three Sisters*, no wanderers ready to set forth for the unknown. The word "Siberia" runs its little chill through the kitchen. The play is nostalgic, for one set of people would do anything *not* to be removed from where they are (a form of self-miring in the present as if it *were* the past), and one set would do anything, short of what is necessary, to *be* removed. The setting is . . . where? A country town. But

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it is the least realistic of Chekhov's plays, or at least what is realistic about it always suggests the allusive, one image connecting with or piling up on a similar one. Masha gives up the piano; Irena is a locked piano; Andrei plays the violin. Vershinin receives letters; Kulighin has his notebooks; Andrei is translating an English novel. A whistled phrase is a signal from Vershinin to Masha or vice versa; the doctor bangs on the floor—his little Morse code. Irena gives her room up for a baby; Olga gives it up for an old woman, Anfisa. These networks are fine meshes thrown over the realistic surface of the play. The webs of character obscure—and enrich—the scaffold of action. And what is allusive about the play suggests the thematically symbolic. Where do people move? From room to room? (Is that why the first thing we see is a room within a room?) But two crucial moves, Irena and Olga doubling up in one bedroom, and Anfisa moving out, are over-shadowed by the movement, the literal displacement, of the soldiers going to two possible destinations: Poland (where we are still within the limits of the civilized and the credible) and Siberia (where we move into the realm of fear and fantasy).

The sense of danger, a hairsbreadth away from the cosy, becomes actual in the fire of Act III. People can really be forced out of their houses, they can be *made to move* by events beyond their power to predict or to control. The fire presents us with a true Apocalypse, its victims huddled downstairs, lost souls wandering about, crying, the rescuers, inside and out, trying to keep the contagion from spreading. Blankets, beds, food are commandeered. Still the shadow of the flames races up the walls. We are in a disaster area, a battlefield. We are also in Olga's and Irena's bedroom. The disaster outside is the general counterpart of the specific horrors within. They have one thing in common: dislocation. For the burning houses are no longer truly houses, any more than the room is now either Olga's *or* Irena's. Natasha has invaded the place of privacy, the source of identity, and we get to know that because it is *after* this scene that Olga moves out to become headmistress and *during* it that Irena decides to marry the Baron and Masha to sleep with Vershinin. And these three decisions prepare us for a fourth: the removal of Anfisa from the household. That is not as simple a decision as it first appears, for Anfisa is the basic—and the last—link with whatever living tradition ties the sisters to their childhoods. The issue of Anfisa is the scale that balances the strengths

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and weaknesses of Olga and Natasha, the turning point of the act and the breaking point of the play. In a psychological terror scene, the fate of the Prozorovs is decided. Natasha's taking over of the house is played against the bigger landscape of the fire destroying the adjacent houses. But the small wreck and the large are equally devastating.

Each sister is given an opportunity for moral or emotional expansion and is finally enclosed in the limited world of the possible. Each outlasts a wish and is forced to go on living a life without any particular pleasure or savor. The sway of compulsion is important to the play because compulsion suggests what must be limited: to be compelled is the opposite of being able to make a free choice. And there are enough examples of the irrational in the air to make the fearful and the uncontrollable real: Vershinin's wife's suicide attempts, Andrei's gambling, the doctor's alcoholism, Natasha's temper, and Soliony, our capital case, because he brings about what we are most afraid of: death. The departed, the unloved, the disappointed—all these are pale imitations of true oblivion. Soliony is the darkest cloud of all.

Three Sisters is enigmatic—it would be hard to say just how the last speeches should be played—sadly, bitterly?—as a kind of cosmic, ridiculous joke? Realistically?— as if in the face of hopelessness it were possible to conceive a Utopia? Only *Hamlet* offers so many unresolved possibilities. Could the doctor have saved Tuzenbach in the last act? Does he let him die to ensure his own continuing relationship to Irena? Is there a homosexual undercurrent in the relationship between Soliony and Tuzenbach? It was suggested in the Olivier-Bates version of the play. Are the trio of Irena's suitors—the doctor, Soliony, and Tuzenbach—an ironic, or merely an instrumental little mirror-play of the sisters themselves, trio for trio? Is Vershinin's vision of the world to come just another more cosmic version of the never-to-be-attained Moscow of Irena's dreams? There are overtones and undertows. More clearly than in any of Chekhov's other plays, fantasy imbues consciousness with a strength similar to the power of dreams in the unconscious. The play teeters on an ambiguity: if coming to terms with reality is a sign of psychological maturity, philosophy offers a contrary alternative: in letting go of an ideal, the sisters may be depriving themselves—or being deprived—of the one thing that makes life worth living.

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These positive-negative aspects of the play are not easily resolved. Ambivalence enriches the action but fogs the ending. The problems *Three Sisters* raises have been presented to us with a complexity that allows for no easy solutions. Yet the curtain has to come down, the audience depart. And Chekhov, almost up to the last moment, keeps adding complications. In spite of its faultless construction, or because of it, the play is full of surprises. Andrei's moving and unexpected speech about Natasha's vulgarity, for instance. He knows how awful she is, and yet he loves her, and can't understand why—an unusual, and far from simple-minded, admission.

The sisters long to accomplish the opposite of what they achieve, to become the contrary of what they are. Masha is most honest about this and most hopeless; she cannot console herself with the optimistic platitudes of Irena or shore herself up with the resigned Puritanism of Olga. Irena is about to rush off to her brick factory and Olga to her schoolroom. Masha lives with and within herself—a black person in a black dress, beautiful, loving, without joy. *Three Sisters*, in spite of its ambiguously worded life-may-be-better-in-the-future ending, might properly be sub-titled, "Three Ways of Learning to Live without Hope." It is a drama of induced stupors and wounds and its tagged-on hopefulness is the one thing about it that doesn't ring true. People use each other in the play sentimentally, desperately, and finally, fatally, and there is no reason to assume that, given the choice, they will ever do anything else.

What we hear in *Three Sisters* are the twin peals of longing and departure. They are amplified by human ineptitude, human error, human weakness. And behind them we hear the clangings of the extreme: the childish, the monstrous, the insane. The Brahmsian overcast of sadness that darkens the action—little outbursts of joy and gaiety always too soon stifled or abandoned—help to make what is essentially a terrible indictment of life bearable. Sadness is at least not hopelessness. A play of girlhood, it is a play of loss, but not only feminine loss, though that strikes the deepest note. The drums and fifes offstage, the batteries that occasionally go off, the gambling house and the office—male institutions and trimmings—are shadowy and have nothing of the power and the immediacy of preparations for a meal, the giving of gifts, the temperature of a nursery—the force of the domestic, whether frustrated and virginal, or fulfilled and turning sour. A play about women—men are strangely absent even in the moment of their presence—its author

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clearly saw what lay at its most profound level: helplessness, a real, social, or contrived trait associated with, and sometimes promulgated by women. Social class and the accident of sex work hand in hand to defeat desire and ambition. Watchers watching life go by, a stately frieze longing for the activity of movement, that is the central image of *Three Sisters*. Not so much "If we had only known . . ." as "If we could only *move* . . ." Temperament, breeding, upbringing fix the sisters to separate stakes. They go on, hoping for the best, getting the worst, which is, in their case, to stay exactly as they were.

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JOYCE CAROL OATES

Night Driving, New Year's Eve 1976

The car plunges westward into the bluing dusk of New York State.
There is no end to it: the snakes that writhe in the headlights,
the scarves of snow, the veins, vines, tendrils,
the sky a crazy broken blue
like crockery.

I am flying above the shredded clouds
thousands of feet above the ground.
I am weightless, I am borne along by the wind.
The foam-heavy waves leap and break
and turn to mist
and turn to eels
snapping back upon themselves.

My eyes are blank and unresisting now.
A pleased dumb hurt has flooded my brain.
The highway is a dark river splashed with anger,
there are figures at the roadside beckoning:
trees, swans, children, pillars, stairways, moons, God.
And the dead, who are so patient.
But they cannot harm me, I am unresisting.
I soar above the cloud of maddened mayflies.

Sinews of snow, pellets of snow,
impish as children; and lovely.
There is no end to it.
Eels fly past the windshield, drunk with joy.
A northern wind lifts a corner of the universe
and it is putty-fresh but empty.
The Void is familiar as a billboard.
The spectres by the roadside are old companions.

What are those luminous signs in another language,
what are those crescent moons and failed suns,
why should I acknowledge them?
My eyelids burn. They ache to close.
But the car plunges westward into the New Year

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and the road passes beneath
and there is no end to it
and even memory begins to stutter.

What is the delirium of such an emptiness?
We are sucked unresisting forward,
we fill the Void supremely with ourselves.

JOHN FANDEL

Highway Birdwatcher

I seemed to become all eye
watching the to-fro bird
among the dry thistles and grasses
too light even to sway them,
not as heavy as the seeds it fed on.

It flickered so airily quickly
I almost did not see
the white circle around its eye
and the other fluttery markings
Peterson makes a bird of.

And how much smaller it seemed
against the cliff of granite,
almost the very color
that would have camouflaged it
except stone is no match for
such steadiness of wings.

I stood on a cement sidewalk
my back to a cement highway
on which thunderbirds whizzed,
falcons, skylarks—you name them—
as if I were staring at stone.

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SAMUEL HAZO

Long Distance Isn't

Separated by a sea, two shores,
the clans of Vercingetorix, the Brenner
Pass, the boot of Italy
from just below the knee to halfway
down the calf, we nix them all
by phone.
Our voices kiss.
Who cares if the Atlantic bashes
Maine, Land's End or Normandy?
We leapfrog hemispheres the way
the mind cavorts through God-knows-what
millenia, what dynasties, what
versions of our kind from
australopithecus to Charlie Chaplin.
The body's place?
Cross latitude
by longitude, and it is there.
The body's age?
Count up
from birth or back from death,
and it is there.
But words?
We launch them out like vows
against the wind.
Creating what we are,
they wing from seas to continents
and make us more than elegies
to yesterday.
Forget the cost.
Talk louder and ignore the static.
Pretend we're walking through the dark.
Don't stop.
Don't stop or look
behind you.
As long as you
keep talking, I can find you.

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Flying Down the Dream

It's like tobogganing.
                You scud
the frosted cupolas of clouds
instead of snow, thumping
over bumps of turbulence
but otherwise at peace.
                Tan
coffee seesaws in your plexicup.
Across the aisle three sailors
argue over five-card stud.
Beside you in the windowseat,
a fourth unfolds by thirds
a centerpage of pelvis, breasts
and then the rest of Miss July. . .
Five minutes west of home, you try
imagining what's going on below.
Your son should be in school.
Your wife might be addressing
envelopes.
            Aging apart from them,
you're like Ulysses viewing Ithaca
from heaven. . .
            Thunderstatic
shakes the fuselage like flak,
and down you drop.
                Buzzers buzz,
and seatbelt signs blink red
in lower-case American and French.
Spilt, your coffee tans
the sunspared ass of Miss July.
The galley's hardware rattles
like a carnival of cans behind
a wedding car.
            You tell yourself
what's happening's not happening.
You bless and hold your holy
breath.
            Everyone aboard

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becomes your brother and your sister
all at once.
You think about
your wife and son without you . . .
Swallowing the choking from your ears,
you watch the cabin lensing
back to focus, caliber by caliber.
A stewardess appears, all smiles
and amnesia.
Over the intercom
the captain's "really sorry about that."
The sailor at your elbow shakes
your coffee from his page and pages back
before he pages on.
And you?
You wait until the steadily ascending
planet turns into the underrolling
runway at the ending . . .
And you breathe.

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JOHN GARDNER

Stillness

It would be a strange thing, Joan Orrick often thought, to have second sight, as her grandmother Frazier was supposed to have had. It occurred to her, for instance, one day when she was forty, when Martin stopped the car to wait for a light at the corner of Olive St. and Grand, in St. Louis. They were just passing through. Martin had delivered a paper at Urbana, and now they were heading for Norman, Oklahoma, where he was to serve on the jury for something called the Newstadt - Books Abroad Prize. "What is it?" she'd asked when first the invitation to Oklahoma had come. "Actually," he'd said, and had put on his pompous look, then changed his mind, "God knows." "Maybe we should drive through St. Louis," she'd said. He'd agreed at once, generous and expansive as he always was when preparing a lecture he thought impressive. She'd been less impressed than she'd pretended, but that was in the past now. And when they'd left Highway 70 and nosed past the arch into the city, she wasn't much impressed by St. Louis either. Beyond the stadium, the scrubbed, unconvincing show of government buildings, the husk of the grand old railroad station where she'd met him all those birthdays and Christmasses—the years before he'd gotten his motorcycle—everything was gray, windblown, burnt out. Driving down haunted streets, brooding on the thought of second sight, she was sorry she'd come.

What would she have thought, though—sometime in the late 1940's, standing on this corner, on her way to her part-time accompanist's job at the Duggers School of the Dance—if she'd suddenly had a vision of what downtown St. Louis would be like just twenty-five years later? What would she have thought, what would she have felt, standing on that crowded, noisy corner, if the crowd had suddenly thinned to just three or four hurrying figures and the buildings had gone solemn, like prison or mausoleum walls?

She imagined the vision coming as pure image, like a photograph or drab documentary film, with no hint of explanation—saw herself, in her 1940's schoolgirl's clothes, pleated skirt and short-sleeved sweater, dark green coat and light green head-scarf, bobby-

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sox and loafers, her hair in a permanent, shiny and curly and a trifle stiff, books in her arm—since she came in directly from school on the bus, or on a chain of buses that shuttled her from Ferguson to Normandy to Wellston to downtown. There had been—was it on this corner?—a wonderful ice-cream place, the Park Plaza, where for a dollar you could get a parfait two feet high, and all around this section there were magnificent theaters, as colorful as circuses, with high, bold marquees on which yellow, red, blue, purple, green, and white lights (lightbulbs, she remembered, and even then the few that had burned out weren't replaced) went racing around tall, urgent titles—*The Rope, On the Waterfront, Frank James' Return*—and inside, the theaters were like palaces: great gilded lions; red-velvet-covered, three-inch-thick ropes on golden posts; majestic, wide stairways that made everyone an instant king or queen; ushers in uniforms from the days of Empire (God knew which empire); and in the great, domed theater itself a hush that was patently religious, the boom of voices from the people on the screen coming from all sides and from within, or so it seemed, oracular.

All the great stores had been downtown then, Famous-Barr, for instance, glittering, high-ceilinged, richly ceremonious inside its towering, gold-framed revolving doors—the aisles choked with shoppers, most of them white, the counters and high walls vend-itating wonders, coats and solemn-toned, stately dresses with the sleeves pinned straight out, extended for flight far overhead, like hovering angels, and everywhere draped artificial-pearl necklaces or ruby-red or pool-ball-green or -blue or -yellow costume baubles, bracelets the color of copper in flame, and everywhere the scent of perfumes and talcums, newly printed books, the leather of new shoes, a smell as exciting and at the same time cloying as a vault of roses in one of the big downtown flowershops, or the thick, sweet incense in a Catholic church. Suppose in the twinkling of an eye, Joan thought, that whole world had vanished, and the girl on the corner, herself at fifteen, looked, stunned and afraid, at a city gone dark and empty: suppose a silence had fallen, as if all the gay sounds of the world had been abruptly turned off, like the music and static on a radio, and there came the same instant a visual stillness, as if a heart had stopped—no motion but three or four hurrying Negroes, strangely dressed, dangerous, with hair grown long and grotesquely puffed up, nothing else stirring but two pigeons overhead and a newspaper blowing along the pavement.

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"I'm in the future!" the imaginary Joan would finally have realized, "and there's been some terrible war, or a plague, and everything's been ruined."

Who'd await the future if she could see it in advance? No use to tell the girl on the corner, "We're happy, Joan. Don't be afraid! There are beautiful places, though this one may be gone." She'd have backed away, frightened and betrayed—yes, terrified, of course. What else could she be, addressed by a strange, wild woman in dark glasses such as Negroes wore then in the most dangerous parts of East St. Louis, a fur coat that looked as if the lynx had died of terror, adrenalin exploding, every hair on end—a woman whose beauty was like fine cutlery, hair falling plain as an Indian's, except red, as brightly burnished and fiery as her own—leaning from the window of a dark blue Mercedes Benz driven by—how weird!—a sorrowful, baggy-eyed man with silver hair that swept down like angelhair to his heavy, hunched shoulders—a monster who was, she had a feeling, suddenly, someone she was meant to recognize.

The girl would have stepped back in fear and anger, raising her hand to the braces on her teeth, and the real Joan would have called to her, shouting past the dead years in pity and anguish, "Child, child, don't be silly! We're as harmless as you are, we've betrayed nobody, nothing! *Look* at us!" Now the child did look, and recognition came: the rich, wildly eccentric lady (who had beautiful teeth, Joan thought and smiled, feeling a surge of affection for the big-nosed innocent on the corner), the lady in the fur, with emeralds and a ruby and a diamond on her fingers, was herself—her own "child," Wordsworth would say—and the driver was Buddy Orrick, grown sadder and crazier, but still alive, and married to her: so they'd made it, they'd survived! She came a step nearer, her face eager, full of questions (*We could drive her to Duggers'*, the real Joan thought; *it's only a few blocks*) and her small hand came cautiously toward the real Joan's hand on the Mercedes' wing-window, both hands equally pale and solid, the child's and the woman's, until suddenly the child's hand was gone and Joan Orrick was gazing at cracked sidewalk, a piece of dirty cardboard: Fragile.

Martin glanced over and saw her tears. "Hurting?" he asked.

Yes, she was hurting, as she nearly always hurt, these days, sometimes such pain that she passed out for a moment—hurting

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even when the drugs were at work, as now, causing visions, or almost-visions—but she said, "No," and gave him a reassuring smile, "just thinking."

He reached over, touched her hand. The light changed, and the car glided forward without a sound.

She said, "Duggers' School of the Dance was just up ahead. Remember?"

"Which building?" He ducked down over the steering wheel to look.

She pointed as the car came abreast of it. It had been gutted by fire, like most of the buildings in this neighborhood. He scanned the boarded-up, blackened storefronts. She could see he wasn't sure which one she meant.

Jacqui Duggers was tiny, the classic teacher of ballet but in perfect miniature, hair so tightly drawn back you might have thought from a distance that it was paint, as on a Japanese doll. She spoke with the accent all ballet teachers use, even those raised in Milwaukee or St. Louis, wiped her forehead with the back of her wrist like an actress, called Joan "dahling" with perfect seriousness and unfeigned affection, though one failed to notice the affection at first, since she was always hurried, always slightly tense, as if in half an hour she must catch a plane for Munich or Paris. She was—or so it seemed to Joan—a superb dancer, though Joan never saw her dance more than a few steps. Her old photographs seemed to confirm the impression: the Jacqui Duggers in the pictures had that authority one sees at a glance in professionals, and they proved she had danced with good companies of the so-called second rank in both the United States and Canada. "Ah *wone*," she would say, and Joan's hands would move automatically on the keys of the piano.

Her husband, Pete Duggers, taught tap-dance in the mirror-walled studio below. He was nearly as small as she was, but thicker, almost stout, in fact, and he looked and moved like some Disney cartoon of a tap-dance teacher. He had a red face and wonderfully merry blue eyes, wore vests and old-fashioned arm-suspenders. If he ever touched the floor when he walked (and he did), Joan had been prepared to believe that he did so by whim. Jacqui's movements at the barre had a look not of lightness, cancellation of gravity, but of majestic, powerful control, as if her muscles were steel and could no more speed up or slow down against her will than the hands of a clock could escape the inclina-

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tions of its mainspring. Rising on her toes in the middle of the room—a brief jerk and click as the heel and ankle locked, a brief trembling like a spasm, then the firmness of an iron wedge—she gave the impression that touching her calf or thigh would be like touching a wall. Pete's dancing feet moved, on the other hand, as if swinging by themselves, as if his body were suspended like a puppet's from invisible wires. His taps were light and quick, as if he never put his weight down with either foot, and they rattled out around him as gaily and casually—and as unbelievably fast—as the fingers of his Negro piano player, a tall, flat-haired boy who sat sprawling in his chair with his head tipped far over so that he seemed to be always, except for his forearms and fingers, fast asleep. The speed and lightness with which Pete Duggers danced were amazing to behold, but what was truly miraculous, so that it made you catch your breath, was the way he could stop, completely relaxed, leaning his elbow on empty air and grinning as if he'd been standing there for hours, all that movement and sound you'd been hearing pure phantom and illusion. That was unfailingly the climax when he danced: a slow build, with elegant shuffles and turns, then more speed, and more, and more and still more until it seemed that the room spun drunkenly, crazily, all leading—direct as the path of an arrow—to nothing, or everything, a sudden stillness like an escape from reality, a sudden floating, whether terrible or wonderful she could never tell: an abrupt hush as when a symphony orchestra drops away, falling back from the soaring of a single French horn—or then again, perhaps, the frightening silence one read about in novels when a buzz-bomb shut off over London. He stood perfectly still, the piano was still, his young students gaped, and then abruptly reality came back as the piano tinkled lightly and he listlessly danced and, as he did so, leaned toward his students and winked. "You see? Stillness! That's the magic!"

Olive Street was already going down at that time, so the storefront was shoddy, solo dancers and dance-class pictures on the windows, big, vulgar stars, the glass around the pictures crudely painted dark blue, as if the Duggers School of the Dance were some miserable third-rate establishment not worth breaking into or stealing from, though the door was not locked. But that was a trick—the dancing Duggers had trunkfuls of tricks: artists to the marrow of their chipped and splintered bones. The scuffed, unpainted door in front opened into a scuffed, unpainted entryway with a door to the left and a knotty, crooked stairway leading upward. On the door to

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the left, a sign said "Tap Dance Studio," and above the worn railing at the side of the stairs, a sign, cocked parallel to the railing, said, "School of the Ballet ☞ ." When you opened the door to the tap-dance studio for the first time, you did a mighty double-take: there were glittering mirrors with round-arched tops and etched designs of the sort Joan would occasionally discover years later in the oldest London pubs, and above the mirrors there were walls of red and gold and a magnificent, stamped-tin ceiling. In fact she'd never completely gotten over her surprise at the elegance inside, though she'd worked there four years, into her college days. It was a large building, at one time a theater. The tap-dance studio—and the ballet studio directly above it—took up the first thirty feet; then there was a railing, also red and gold, from which one looked out at the long, wide ballroom floor, at the front an enormous stage boxed off by ratty, stiff, wine-colored velvet curtains, along the side walls wall-candelabra between high, painted panels—dancing graces, Zeus in majesty, nymphs and satyrs, peacocks and fat, reclining nudes done in highly unsuccessful imitation of the late style of Rubens.

She'd walked there once with Martin—in those days "Buddy"—when he'd motorcycled in from his college in Indiana and had offered to drive her to work in her father's DeSoto. He'd driven fast, as usual, his eye rolling up to the rear-view mirror, on the look-out for police cars, and had gotten her to work much too early.

"Care to have an interesting experience?" she'd said.

Their footsteps echoed. The ballroom was half dark. They could just make out the carved figures on the ceiling, two stories up, circling around the empty spaces from which once had hung huge chandeliers.

"It's like a church," he said. He had a crewcut. Leather jacket. He hung his cigarette off his lip like Marlon Brando. Already he'd written two novels—unpublishable; terrible, in fact, though of course she hadn't said so. She was convinced, in spite of them, that he'd someday be famous, someday when he'd given up James Joyce.

She'd squeezed his hand and they'd stopped and, after a moment, kissed, then walked on, up to the front of the ballroom and up onto the stage, where the Duggers' students gave their dance recitals. They looked up at the shuttered lights, ropes, catwalks—it was darker here, spooky, as if the stage machinery belonged not only to a different time but to a different planet. Again they paused

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to kiss, and he put his arms around her and after a minute she moved his hand to the front of her sweater, then under the sweater to her breast. With his usual difficulty, for all his practice, he unsnapped her bra. She felt her nipples rising, and he pressed closer to her. With a grandiose sweep of his free arm in the direction of the dim, ghost-filled hall, he whispered, "Lady, how would you like to be fucked, right here in front of all these people?"

"Hmm," she said. After a moment, still with his hand on her breast, her hand keeping it there, she led him toward the further wing and the small door opening on a room she'd discovered weeks earlier, half-filled with crates, electric wire, old tools, cobwebs, the rotting frames of old sets. Here and there stood old pieces of furniture—chairs, tables, couches—protected from the dust by tarpaulins. "Maybe we need a rehearsal," she said. They passed under a high window through which a single crack of light came and she glanced at her watch. Fifteen minutes. She stood looking around, both his hands on her breasts, until he finally noticed the couch and went over and pulled away the tarpaulin. As he came into her, huge and overeager, as always—but so was she, so was she—she said, "Isn't this an interesting experience?"

She glanced at Martin—Buddy middle-aged. He stared past the steering wheel, professorial, absentminded. They'd slipped from his thoughts already, those years, the Duggers. His hands on the wheel were soft, almost fat, though still muscular. She looked at his face. "What are you thinking?" she said.

Martin flicked his eyes down, half apologetic. "Nothing," he said. "Something Athene tells Odysseus. Nothing." He looked suddenly embarrassed.

She glanced out the window again, then reached for her purse, opening it, fumbling for a pill.

"Hurting again?"

Her mouth tightened in annoyance at that "again." "Just tired," she said.

"We should have taken a plane," he said, and ducked to look up past the buildings.

The sky was gray, luminous and still, like Lake Erie from one of those hushed, abandoned beaches. She thought of Jacqui Duggers.

"There's still a little coffee in the thermos," Martin said.

"Coffee?"

"To help swallow the pill."

"Oh. No, it's done." His helplessness cheered her. "Odysseus,"

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she thought. Homer had been the subject of his lecture at Urbana. She smiled a little sadly. So he was wishing, as usual, that he might talk about himself. Not that he would do it; he had far too much taste. And she, for her part . . . She shook her head and smiled again.

The whole left side of the building, as you entered from the street, was the Duggers' apartment. It was the most beautiful apartment she'd ever seen, though not as original or even as spectacularly tasteful as she'd imagined at the time. She would see many like it in San Francisco, and far more elegant examples of white-on-white in London and Paris. Everything was white, the walls, the furniture, the chains holding up the chandeliers, the wooden shutters on the windows. Against all that white, the things they'd collected stood out in bold relief: paintings, presumably by friends, all very curious and impressive, at least to Joan—smudges, bright splashes of color, one canvas all white with little scratches of gray and bright blue; sculptures—a beautiful abstraction in dark wood, a ballet dancer made out of pieces of old wire, museum reproductions, a mobile of wood and stainless steel; books and records, shelves upon shelves of them. Their record-player was the largest she'd ever seen and had a speaker that stood separate from the rest. Once when Jacqui invited her in, to write Joan her check for the week's work, Jacqui, leading the way to the kitchen, stopped suddenly, turned with a ballerina's step, and said, "Joanie, I must show you my shoes, no?" "I'd like to see them," Joan said. Jacqui swept over to the side of the room, her small hand gracefully flying ahead of her, and pushed open a white sliding door. Joan stared. On tilted shelves that filled half the room's wall, Jacqui had three hundred pairs of tiny shoes. She had all colors—gold and silver, yellow, red, green, some with long ties as bright as new ribbons, some with little bows, some black and as plain as the inside of a pocket. "Where'd you *get* all these?" Joan said. Jacqui laughed. "Mostly Paris," she said. She gave Joan a quick, appraising look, then laughed again. "Dahling, Paris you are going to love. There is a store, a department store, *Au Printemps*. When you go there, blow a kiss for Jacqui!" She rolled her eyes heavenward. "Ah, ze French!"

Years later, the first time Joan shopped at *Au Printemps,* she would remember that, and would do as she'd been told. And she would remember Jacqui too a few years later when, at Lambert Field in St. Louis, deplaning with her family from a European trip, she was

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approached by a news crew of very cool, very smart blacks from KSDF-TV, carrying camera and wind-baffled shotgun mike, who asked if she had any suggestions for improvement of the airport's services. "Way-el," she said thoughtfully, smiling prettily, batting her lashes and speaking in her sweetest Possum Hollow drawl. (Martin and the children had fled into the crowd.) She tapped her mouth with a bejewelled finger and gazed away down the baggage area, then said pertly, as if it were something she'd been thinking for a long, long time and rather hated to bring up, "Ah thank it would be nice if awl these people spoke French." Her performance was included in that night's local news. Her parents missed it, as was just as well. Relatives telephoned to report with pleasure that Joanie had been on television. No one mentioned that anything she'd said was peculiar.

"I wonder if I'll ever get to Paris," she'd said that afternoon in Jacqui's apartment.

Jacqui had laughed like a young girl, though she was then over forty. "Keep playing the piano and don't theenk twice," Jacqui said. "If you don't go to Paris, then Paris will have to come to you."

Where would they have gone, Joan wondered now, when the neighborhood had grown too dangerous to live in? Were they still alive? It came to her suddenly, for no apparent reason, that Pete Duggers had looked like the hero of her favorite childhood book, Mr. Mixiedough, in the story of the whole world's slipping into darkness. It was a book she'd wanted for Evan and Mary, but there seemed to be no copies left anywhere; not even the book-search people from whom Martin got his rare old books could find a trace of it. Had it been the same, perhaps, with Pete and Jacqui Duggers—swallowed into blackness? She'd asked about him once at the Abbey, on 13th Street in New York, when she'd gone—three times—to a show called *The Hoofers*, which had brought back all the great old soft-shoe and tap men. On the sidewalk in front of the theater afterward, while she was waiting for Martin to come and pick her up, she'd talked with Bojangles Robinson and Sand Man Sims—they'd shown her some steps and had laughed and clapped their hands, dancing one on each side of her—and she'd asked if either of them had ever heard of Pete Duggers.

The Sand Man rolled up his eyes and lifted off his hat as if to look inside it. "Duggers," he'd said, searching through his memory.

"You say the man worked out of San Looie?" Bojangles said.

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"I played piano for his wife," Joan said. "She taught ballet."

"Duggers," said the Sand Man. "That surely does sound familiar."

"White man married to a *bal*let teacher," Bojangles said, and ran his hand across his mouth. "Boy, that surely rings a bell, some way."

"Duggers," the Sand Man said, squinting at the lighted sky. "Duggers."

"He used to go faster and faster and then suddenly stand still," she said. "He was a wonderful dancer."

"Duggers," Bojangles echoed, thoughtful, staring at his shoes. "I know the man sure as I'm standing here. I got him right on the tip of my mind."

At the motel that night, sixty miles past St. Louis—it was a new Ramada Inn, as new as the concrete and dark-earth slash through what had lately been farmland—Joan sat up after Martin was asleep, unable to sleep herself, waiting for the Demerol to start working. On the mirror-smooth walnut formica desk lay Martin's paper, "Homeric Justice and the Artful Lie." Though he'd delivered it already, it was a maze of revisions. He'd been "working it over a bit," as he said, before he'd at last given up in despair, as usual, kissed her on the cheek, and gone to bed. Eventually, no doubt, he'd include it in some book, or make it the plan of some story or novel. He was forever revising, like her stern-jawed, icy-eyed grandmother's God—or like God up to a point. Joan Orrick thought for an instant—then efficiently blocked the thought—of the doctor in New York who had spoken to them, incredibly, of psychiatric help and "the power of prayer." She slid Martin's paper toward her with two fingers, glancing at the beginning. "In Attic Greek," he'd written—and then came something in, presumably, Greek.

She looked for perhaps half a minute at the writing, tortuous, cranky, as familiar as her own but more moving to her: it contained all their years—they'd been married at nineteen, had been married for more than half their lives—and she found herself thinking (she was not aware of why) of her grandmother Frazier's sternly Southern Baptist attic: old *Christian Heralds* full of pictures of angels, stacked tight under cobwebbed rafters; small oak-leaved picture frames as moldy as old bread; a squat deal dresser with broken glass handles; tied-up bundles of music as brown-spackled and

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brittle as her grandmother's hands; and on the attic's far side, trunks of clothes—dusty black and what she thought of as Confederate gray. The old woman's predictions had been terrible and sure, or so legend had it. Her brother, Joan Orrick's great-uncle Zack, would stand on the porch of his cabin in the woods when a tornado came roaring like a thousand trains, and would fire at the wind with a shotgun.

The cabin was long gone, like her grandmother's house, like her grandmother, like Martin's beloved Homer. She touched the pulse in her throat with two fingers and looked at her watch. Normal, and yet she felt drained, weary. Not entirely an effect of the wine they'd had at dinner, though also it was not yet the drug. She slid away the paper, rose quietly, and moved past the wide, still bed where her husband lay sleeping, his broad, mole-specked back and shoulders uncovered, motionless as marble except for his breathing, exactly as he'd always slept, winter and summer. She was slightly surprised for an instant by his lighted gray hair. Outside, the parking lot was dusty with the still, cold light of lamps half hidden among maples the bulldozers had left. She looked hastily back into the clean, noncommittal room.

When she'd crawled into bed with him, carefully not waking him, she lay for a time with her eyes open, eyes that might have seemed to a stranger, she knew, as cold and remote as her grandmother's. As she drifted toward sleep it crossed her mind—her lips and ringless right hand on Martin's arm—and the thought was so casual she would scarcely remember it—that sooner or later everyone, of course, knows the future.

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Reviews

ROGER SALE

Castles Joyeous, and Caves of Despair[1]

JAMES NOHRNBERG'S THE ANALOGY OF "THE FAERIE QUEENE" is a stupendously learned book, in its ways and means as well as in its sheer bulk reminiscent of Toynbee's *A Study of History*. Even the chapter titles sound like Toynbee's: "The Advent of the Word," "The Siege of Paradise," "Errant Damozell: The Church in the Wilderness," "The Beginning of Idolatry." The text runs just short of eight hundred pages, the index takes sixty. On a fairly typical page, p. 104, the subject is Archimago, and in the text the allusions are to Prospero, Faustus, Demogorgon, and Ismeno in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, plus a quotation from Pico della Mirandola. There are two footnotes, which take up more than half the page. The first cites another work of Pico's, then Ernst Cassirer, Renaissance experts on magic named Giambattista Porta, Tommaso Campanella, and Francesco Maria Guazzo; the second directs our attention to Boccaccio, Lucan's *Pharsalia*, an anonymous scholastic gloss on Lucan, a contemporary Dante scholar, David Quint, and a Renaissance Dante scholar, Mazzoni, winding up with Robin in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. I picked that page entirely at random, and, thus listed, the learning involved here seems tame compared to the pages which concern Biblical exegesis, the Talmud and the Zohar, and the Church Fathers. The quoting, which is the whole fun of the book, is very good, because Nohrnberg knows what he wants, knows if it is Augustine or Aquinas, *Wisdom* or *Esdras*, Luther or Calvin or Melancthon, Timothy Bright or Lavater or Robert Burton (though, in a book not at all free of error, he is called Richard) who is best for his present needs.

Yet, both in spite of and because of its immense erudition, *The Analogy of "The Faerie Queene"* is a simple, even a silly book, and Nohrnberg is a library with a clumsy classification system rather than an author. To trace down and spin out all that everything in Spenser's poem might be analagous to is such a staggering task that it is bound to seem self-fulfilling and self-justifying, and Nohrnberg may not have asked if it were worth doing. This is how it works:

> "Surely the idoles have spoken vanitie, and the soothsayers have sene a lie"—so we may say of Duessa and Archimago in the cycle of Israel or the "old church." But the old Church typifies the new Church, and the new Church, it is logically deduced from Paul's Adamic Christology, is

[1] THE ANALOGY OF "THE FAERIE QUEENE," by *James Nohrnberg*. Princeton University Press. $37.50; $12.50 paperback. THE GROWTH OF A PERSONAL VOICE, by *Judith H. Anderson*. Yale University Press. $15.00.

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> a second Eve. If Una is an Eve, then to whom does Duessa answer? She must be the wife of Adam too, that is, Adam's other wife, or Lilith.

Nohrnberg is not usually this much given to forcing his "musts" into a "logic," because usually he simply finds two things to be analagous, one coming from *The Faerie Queene* and the other from anywhere else. But no matter; the point, always, is to get to that other thing, in this case Lilith. This is followed by seven pages on Lilith, and the focus finally settles on Luther's comment on the lilith mentioned in *Isaiah,* which then turns, by a neat twist, into a discussion of other things mentioned in that passage, namely ruins and screech-owls, and that in turn takes us to John Bale's comment on ruins mentioned in *Revelation,* which happens to have sirens in it, so off we go with sirens for a few pages, ending with this typical paragraph:

> The example of Phaedria reminds us that sirens are also marine creatures, with a seductive song "that leads the auditor to death," as the interlinear *Glossa* on Isaiah 13:22 explains.[361] In this category is the Babylonian siren of St. Ambrose:
>
> > Jeremiah also hath prophesied concerning Babylon, that the daughters of sirens shall dwell therein, in order to show that the snares of Babylon, that is, of the tumult of the world, are to be likened to stories of old-time lust, that seemed upon this life's rocky shore to sing some tuneful song, but deadly withal to catch the souls of youth . . .[362]
>
> Ambrose then cites Ulysses' restraint before that "deceitful shows and allurements of pleasure," and refers to I Corinthians 9:27 on Paul's need for self-discipline, lest he become a castaway. In the *Physiologus* the sirens represent hypocrisy,[363] and Jerome echoes this interpretation in his comment on Micah 1:18, where the Septuagint says that Samaria "will intone a song of mourning like the daughters of the Sirens"; "for," Jerome explains, "the songs of heretics can be sweet indeed and they deceive the peoples with pleasant sounds."[364] All these traditions take us toward Dante's second dream in the *Purgatorio* (XIX, 7–60), where a kind of synthesis is achieved. We are on the cornice of Sloth, and the pilgrim is asleep. Just before the dawn a bald "old witch" (as she is afterwards called) comes to the dreamer; under his gaze she seems to have become seductively beautiful, and she sings of having allured Ulysses. Then a holy and alert lady appears to "confuse" her. At the direction of the "honest one," Virgil intervenes. "Tearing her clothes," Virgil "laid bare her breast and showed her belly/the stench of which awakened me." Duessa is similarly stripped by Arthur at the behest of Una.[365]

This last footnote refers us to Falsehood being old and bald in Alanus de Insulis, then to Boccaccio on sirens.

And Spenser? Spenser plays a note, and lest he be caught hearing two or three consecutive notes, or a chord, Nohrnberg rushes off—Spenser himself is a siren?—finding everything suggested to him by that note. It would

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not be true to say that *The Analogy of "The Faerie Queene"* has more to do with Benjamin Franklin or Montezuma than with Spenser, but it is quite wonderful how little *The Faerie Queene* even ostensibly comes into view. When the poem does appear, it is almost always as in the paragraph above, where we learn much less about Duessa than what a minute or two with the poem reveals; it's all right there in Fradubio's story (I, ii, 33–42). "The following study attempts to offer a critically unified commentary on *The Faerie Queene*," Nohrnberg says at the outset, and then glosses that as follows: "Thus what began as a *criticism* of the poem, in the sense of an analysis of its ostensible total form, evolved into a *commentary*, a divulging of the form's hidden content." A divulging, if you please. The hidden content, too, but hidden only in the sense that while we are reading *The Faerie Queene* lots of others books are not in view, probably not even nearby. As a critic in the ordinary sense of the term, Nohrnberg doesn't even begin to count. He quotes Spenser only as a last resort, never discusses two consecutive stanzas, seldom looks and never looks hard at what he does quote. He treats the poem's materials as though they could be placed in any order, or, better still, in special Nohrnbergian orders; he imagines such things as that the presence of Proteus in the same poem with Archimago "unifies" it because the two characters are similar. Above all, his statements of the poem's meaning are statements of the obvious.

What Nohrnberg is writing about is on the fringe of the poem. Spenser, unlike some other writers, demands little commentary that names references and allusions because most of the time he tells you what he wants you to think of Cupid, Jove, Arthur, or Gloriana, and since he often changes his characterizations of these and many others, the immediate context will do 95% of the interpretive tasks 95% of the time. Let me take a couple of examples, the first one trivial. In I, iii Una meets a woman bearing a pot of water and asks for information about lodgings. The woman, a "rude wench," cannot hear, speak, or understand, and when she sees the lion by Una's side she drops her pot and runs. Later we learn the woman is Abessa, used in whoredom by Kirkrapine, but the first incident gives us no gloss on itself. Nohrnberg cites the Samaritan woman who talks with Jesus at the well in the fourth chapter of *John*, and the gloss on this passage in the Geneva Bible refers to *II Kings* 17, where the Samaritans, it is prophesied, will be slain when the Lord sends lions among them. Neat: Una as Jesus, Abessa as the Samaritan woman, Una's lion as the Lord's avenging instrument. But, except for the similarity of the image of the pot, the two incidents bear no other relation to each other, and the Samaritan woman could not be less like Abessa. Nonetheless, Spenser does not explain his image, and he may well have gotten it from *John*. But to read one incident as parallel to the other is to distort both, and the meaning of Spenser's image is unaltered by reference to its possible source. If the point is important, Spenser always explains it, shapes it, makes it his own; if it is not, it is not, and Spenser may allow an image to lie there, an added decoration or nuance.

There is a much worse danger than messing with trivia that comes from worrying about the "hidden content" of Spenser's allegory. Tracing down all the Biblical echoes and allusions not only impedes the slow attentive-

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ness the poem requires; it also implies that Holiness was a subject for Spenser, and that the allusions are designed to refer us to some exclusively "religious level of meaning," and this is fatally wrong. For instance, the Red Crosse Knight dreams of a false Una early in Book I, and Nohrnberg goes on at great length to show that this false Una is Duessa, who "must" be born the moment the knight is separated from the Truth: "From the dream onwards, the knight's grasp on truth becomes like ours, fitful and proximate." Spenserians talking about Truth in Book I always make me feel like Little Jo in *Bleak House* listening to Mr. Chadband talking about "the Terewth"; I think someone is going to make me get my hair cut. Insofar as Norhnberg is saying something not obvious, he is dead wrong. Red Crosse's grasp on the truth is no different after the dream than it is before; it is fitful and proximate until very late in Book I. Much better to say he is deluded and tempted by a dream; do so, and the way he is being faithless to the truth will be perfectly clear, and clear precisely to the extent Spenser wants. At this point he is not working in explicit religious terms because holiness begins only when we recognize our need to seek God's forgiveness and blessing, and Red Crosse is a long way from that point here. Faithlessness at the end of Canto i is primarily a sexual act and only faintly, as yet, a religious disaster. Neither holiness nor faithlessness can, for Spenser, be walled off from the rest of life, to be subjects understood in reference to the arcane. When Norhnberg implies we need this or that allusion to recover the hidden content of the allegory, he is being brutally unjust to the poem and, what may be more or less inexcusable, uncaring about the nature of religious experience.

Nor will it do to try to save this book by saying it is potentially useful as a reference book. It is too arbitrarily arranged, too incomplete, too concerned with following itself rather than the poem, to be that. Nor would I even admit it is harmless. *The Faerie Queene* has never been blessed with an excess of readers, and if just one of them got the wrong message and allowed this book to be treated as a substitute for the poem, then a great deal would be lost. No, this is just another American academic assault on the softwood forests of this continent.

Judith H. Anderson's *The Growth of a Personal Voice,* which is about *Piers Plowman* and *The Faerie Queene,* is a good deal shorter, and slightly better, than Nohrnberg's monster, since in at least a few places it gives its reader something to do other than to be dazzled, bored, infuriated, and depressed by turns. It reads, alas, very much like a Ph.D. dissertation, which it may or may not once have been. Though most of the book is about Spenser, it goes wrong because it wants to impose on his poem a pattern much more easily found and traced in Langland. The "personal voice" in Langland is not Langland's but Will's, and the point is that Will comes to know God's will as he comes to know himself and his relation to reality as well as to Scripture, dogma, and churches. That this is a growth is more debatable, but Will does change, especially after Passus XII, when Imaginative enters the poem. Anderson is saying nothing startling here, but she really is only trying to develop a model she can then use to work with *The Faerie Queene.*

A good deal of the difficulty Anderson gets into is the result of being

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fond of what Huck Finn calls "stretchers." Because *Piers Plowman* is a dream vision, Anderson wants to discuss dreams in Book I; not content with having Red Crosse's dream of the false Una, she wants to annex Duessa's visit to the underworld in Canto v. "We know that Redcrosse is in bed in Canto v, but we are not told explicitly, as we are in Canto i, that he is asleep. . . . Partly because the dream at Archimago's exists as a precedent and as a point of allusion, the illusory experiences in Canto v are not, and do not have to be, so explicitly and literally a dream as in Canto i." Pure fudge. There is no dream here, and Anderson knows there isn't, but she wants it to be one anyway. Duessa's trip to the underworld is not the least "illusory," and, perhaps strangest of all, Anderson goes on to reveal she knows this:

> I should even more simply ask why Canto v gives us a hell so markedly literary. . . . The art in Canto v is paradoxically less faked and more artificial; it helps shift our attention from the weaknesses and failures of our physical senses to the grander and more sophisticated delusions of pride.

To the extent that Spenser's underworld is an adaptation of Homer's and especially Virgil's, which is what Anderson means by saying it is so markedly literary, to that extent it will seem like a display, a rhetorical show, and not seem like a dream; certainly it does not draw our attention to the delusions of pride anywhere near as much as the dwarf's and Red Crosse's passage through the nether regions of the House of Pride which follows. I would grant that at this point in the poem something like a dream, which could convey a sense that both Sansjoy and Red Crosse are being taken through the regions of the night, is what seems called for. In fact what we get is "Up, then! up, dreary dame, of darknesse queene! Go gather up the reliques of thy race," or high gaudy rhetoric, nothing like a dream, and not much that could "compromise the whole classical view—both its self-sufficient value and its forms." Again, I think the classical view is much more clearly and explicitly compromised in the following scene, where Romulus, Caesar, Antony, Cleopatra and others are seen as "many corses, like a great lay-stall of murdered men, which therein strowed lay." But since no one could claim that that scene is part of a dream, Anderson must avoid it, and offer her stretchers about the previous one. Drop all the nonsense about dreams, though, remember that those to whom the poem is always happening are its readers rather than its characters, and no such trouble need have arisen.

The major thesis of the book suffers just this fate. Here we begin to see it, in the most interesting pages in the book:

> We sense and respond to the nearness of realized human experience in Books I and II and sometimes encounter it directly, but it is characteristically distanced and qualified either by the poet's position—religious or narrative—or by the limited personalities of his agents. Perhaps it is best seen in the service—and in memorable instances *noticeably* in the

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> service—of a principle or belief and perhaps, on the whole, best called self-effacing. The poet's position in the first two books is a source of profound strength but also of weakness.

The weakness in the opening books, Anderson says, is that the sense of experience is confined, too emblematic:

> Poetic control—especially control through irony—can verge on emotional distance or suggest manipulation. The natural context of abstraction is the mind, and of an allegorical poem, the mind of a person. Such a mind in process is undogmatic and a little untidy. Settled intention and taut control can concentrate power but can also have a price.

Anderson then quotes a passage from the unnamed speaker who sings the *carpe diem* song in the Bower of Bliss: "Whilest loving thou mayst loved be with equal crime," where obviously it is Spenser, not the singer, who is responsible for that word "crime."

I think Anderson is generally wrong here, but this is light years away from anything Nohrnberg could come up with, because it is about something, and because Anderson is trying to make useful distinctions. First, I quite agree with Anderson that Book II, great though much of it is, is working with material Spenser finds close to intractable, and so it never gains the power of the great sequences of Books I, III, and, to a lesser extent, IV. I would also agree that Book III is the finest thing in the poem, and for reasons Anderson names: there Spenser is at his freest, most flexible, and is most imaginatively attuned with his materials. But she is quite wrong about Book I. It does have some sluggish and overly emblematic moments in Cantos iii–vi, but not even Herbert shows as profound an awareness of spiritual torments and purgings as Spenser shows in I, vii–xi. Norhnberg is so little interested in most of these cantos he even decides to call the House of Holiness the House of Celia (he also strangely thinks Proteus lives in a house); Anderson has a brief go at the very end of Canto x, but has so little sense of the sequential context as to make little headway. I once again conclude that these evasions are the result of Spenser's wisdom here being very grim as well as very wise, and thereby very generous; and grimness, wisdom, and generosity are not the central interests of most Spenserians.

But all this is only assertion, and demonstration would take too long. It is time to turn to the personal and occasionally unemblematic voice of the later books of the poem. Spenser is a dogmatic poet only where for him the dogma is true, strict, and binding, because straight is the gate and narrow the way. For the most part no poet is more varied and flexible. In the usual sense he is always willing to be untidy, because he, unlike Nohrnberg, knows instinctively that his poem is unified by the truth of his knowledge and by the freedom that gives him; he needs no other unity. That truth is not personal, and the poem's greatness is contingent on its being free of self-concern. But Anderson likes the "personal voice," though what she means by that term turns out to be a hodgepodge. It is the vividness of

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Britomart's personality when compared with Red Crosse's or Guyon's; it is the interesting chorus of voices in III, iv, where Britomart, Cymoent, and Arthur speak while strongly rooted in a sense of self and situation; it is something I confess I can make nothing of concerning Ate in Book IV; it is the decreasingly emblematic role given Arthur as he reappears in the later books (and Anderson's account of Arthur's relation to Artegall in Book V is the best analysis of the book); it is Melibee's believing his pastoral world is the whole world, or even enough of it for him; it is the meeting of Calidore and Colin Clout, the romantic and lyric Spensers; it is the many first person intrusions that come into the poem beginning with Book IV.

One sees vaguely what Anderson wants, though using "personal" to cover all these robs the term of its usefulness. She so much prefers characters to emblems, personalness to stern impersonality, that she wants simply to say, or imply, that the presence of any of these "personal" qualities in the poem improves it. Her choice of what episodes to discuss seems so arbitrary that one spends time thinking of counter-arguments, places in Books I–II where Spenser is "personal," or places in the later books where nothing "personal" is present at all. In any event, at no point does Anderson, flitting about amongst these thousands of lines, even try to say that Spenser is *growing* as the poem proceeds, or that his voice *grows* more personal; how could she, since she has to find so many different sorts of evidence just to make a case at all, and must also ignore the fact that in some striking instances in the later books, Spenser is very personal and also very irascible, bitter, ill-tempered even, something no one could or would want to grow into. To read *The Faerie Queene* listening for a personal voice is even more perverse than to read it looking for the humor; both are there, but neither is remotely close to what is central in the poem. So, though this book has a few moments, it is altogether too interested in itself, in making its own way, to count as more than another effort to despoil North American forests.

Actually, the paper probably is not going to run out, but the Blatant Beast of American academe seems totally heedless of the waste, to say nothing of the danger. Even with a press run of two thousand copies, there is enough paper used in *The Analogy of "The Faerie Queene"* to supply a good literary quarterly for many years. These writers, especially Nohrnberg, seem so oblivious, seem so much like residents of Castle Joyeous, that goodly frame and stately port of Malecasta's, when their residence is really the Cave of Despair; they will not read this great poem, and Nohrnberg will do anything to avoid having to face it. Anderson's failures are more modest, less wasteful, but her arbitrariness makes her seem no less willful, no more content to let the poem be itself. It never seems to have occurred to either that Spenser is *better* than we are, smarter, more perceptive, wiser, more capacious. Someone from whom we can learn. He is not a tosser-up of frivolous learned confections such as might delight no one more than Martianus Capella. Nor is he, in the poem, essentially interested in himself, a despairing Romantic, a Shelley struggling to win through to self.

There is time for one example, surely, since many readers of this review

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are not confirmed admirers of *The Faerie Queene*. I want something too emblematic for Anderson, too much itself for Nohrnberg, the recovery of Red Crosse from the prisons of Orgoglio at the end of I, viii. When Arthur and Una find him,

> His sad dull eies, deepe sunck in hollow pits,
> Could not endure th' unwonted sunne to view,
> His bare thin cheekes for want of better bits,
> And empty sides deceived of their dew,
> Could make a stony hart his hap to rew. . .

Una, throughout the episode, is not the least a figure of Truth, and Arthur has had to lecture her on despair before this, but her heart is far from stony, and it is riven at the sight of her knight: "of your selfe, ye thus berobbed are." She tries to cheer him up—"But welcome now, my lord, in wele or woe"—to moralize—"and for these wronges shall treble penaunce pay of treble good." But Red Crosse is far beyond such language: "The cheareless man, whom sorow did dismay, /Had no delight to treaten of his griefe," because "His long endured famine needed more reliefe."

But what relief is now possible? He has lost his way, and so long ago he cannot say when. The guilt of his dalliance with Duessa is supplanted by the simple desire to die, and no relief this side of the House of Holiness is truly possible. But Arthur speaks:

> 'Faire lady,' then said that victorious knight,
> 'The things, that grievous were to doe, or beare,
> Them to renew, I wote, breeds no delight;
> Best musicke breeds dislike in loathing eare:
> But th' only good, that growes of passed feare,
> Is to be wise, and ware the like again.
> This daies ensample hath this lesson deare
> Deepe written in my heart with yron pen,
> That blisse may not abide in state of mortal men.'

Earlier Arthur has been as divine Providence, as the Spenserians so love to point out, and later he will be the lover of the Faerie Queene. Here he is only supremely civilized. He knows how much Red Crosse loathes Una's attempts to say the "best musicke," but his implied rebuke of her modifies quickly into his knowing there is so little to say: "ware the like again." Yet Red Crosse has been plunged so low precisely because he has never been "ware of," wary of, bewared of himself, his complicity, his pride, his joylessness, or his compassion and his heroism. The sight of him thus is so terrible he can teach Arthur a lesson, which has nothing to do with what has happened, or what Red Crosse or Una should do now, beyond what they may be assured of: bliss past or bliss to come, bliss lost or hoped for, may not abide. Arthur says so fully and richly the little that can be said that in the grimness there is comfort and reassurance, forgiveness above all.

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Think of another moment, one of the great scenes in later literature, the visit of Lydgate to Casaubon and Dorothea in *Middlemarch* where he attempts to diagnose Casaubon's illness. The analogies are easily enough worked out. What George Eliot does is take Lydgate from one strand of her web, and bring him over to another, where he seems so intelligent and compassionate, but in a way that heartrendingly crystallizes the fate of Casaubon and the innocence of Dorothea. It is for them that we care; we weep, as Olivia Manning once said of Chekhov, and not for ourselves alone. Here, in Spenser, it is all different. Because the characters are generalized and the scene bare and the language abstract, we are free to think of ourselves, of the moments we have been in Red Crosse's situation (often, to our greater condemnation, without our knowing it), of the others where we have attempted to speak Una's best musicke, but above all of the speediness of our desire to flinch from the wisdom of Arthur, generous though it is. From it, could words change lives, we might indeed learn to "ware the like again."

Of course it needs no personal voice for the telling. But Spenser signs it as his own, in every turn of every line, expressing, and clarifying, some of our most everlasting torments and possibilities. Of course it needs no gloss on Truth, Holiness, or the ancestry of Arthur either. Now is as good a time as any for the academic Spenser revival to be over, for our forests to be made a little more secure, for any who do not live in the Cave of Despair to read this greatest of our poems.

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VERNON YOUNG

"The Death, the Lullaby, the Glory"

A HELEN WADDELL MEMORIAL WOULD HAVE BEEN MY TITLE for the presently named *More Latin Lyrics*,[1] a posthumous collection of vital translations which extends from Virgil and Horace in the Classical world to the *Carminax Burana* (thirteenth century) and beyond. Chosen from the late Miss Waddell's several texts by Dame Felicitas Corrigan (of the Benedictine Order), the poems and commentaries transcend whatever value they may have for Latin scholars. The issues that aroused the eloquence, the pride and the shame of men whose society had the falling sickness are living issues for us, the more so as Helen Waddell's versions, many written under the immediate stress of historical reenactment, restore blood to the veins of the marble. For those unfamiliar with Helen Waddell, save as the author of *Peter Abelard,* a summary of her career is in order, for it was both distinguished and tragic.

Youngest child of an Irish Presbyterian missionary, she was born in Japan, 1889, left motherless when two years old and at the age of ten taken home to Ulster by a father she deeply loved, who died within a year, leaving her to a stepmother she learned deeply to hate. Graduated with distinction from Queen's University, 1911, she remained in Belfast, though yearning for Oxford; chafed under the stepmother's authority but published lyrics and legends inspired by Celtic and Eastern sources. As in the fairy tales, Bad Stepmother died and Miss Waddell, in her thirtieth year to heaven, "with hair already silvering," went to Oxford, where her imagination and independent scholarship were readily appreciated. She was forty when her *Medieval Latin Lyrics* was published. The genesis of her *second* book of Latin lyrics, under review, took place during, and took color from, the impending years of World War II, "silted together" in her mind, as she put it, by the events of 1938, 1939, and the more devastating years that followed. "It was Troy," suggests Dame Corrigan, "it was Rome, it was Paris, it was London. As for the Hitler of 1938, his name in 410 had been Alaric the Goth, and 40 years later, Attila, the scourge of God." Helen Waddell herself wrote at the time, "I have been so haunted by France [the Collapse and the Resistance] that I went back to Virgil, the fall of Troy, and all the old Fifth Column business of the Trojan horse and the tearful refugee who was the traitor. . . ." And with un-Irish respect for the host country she wrote to a friend, after fire-watching on a roof during the Blitzkrieg:

> De la Mare once said to me that he wished he could talk to a Chinese or a Japanese, because he might have a sudden revelation of another way of living. I think that revelation came to me tonight. It may be

[1] MORE LATIN LYRICS: FROM VIRGIL TO MILTON, trans. by *Helen Waddell*. Ed. with an introduction, by *Dame Felicitas Corrigan*. Norton $12.95.

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because if one is Irish and living in an England I love passionately because I do often see it from outside, one has that double life.

Her gifts, her love and her "sudden revelation" deserved better of fate. Before the end of the war, Helen Waddell began to suffer spells of amnesia—incurable by medical skill—which relentlessly took the form of mental paralysis, in which state she lived (if *we* would call it that) uncomplaining, devout, passive as a stone, for the last twelve years of her life. The heart breaks on this thought.

I should have liked to quote yards of her Petronius Arbiter, or of Alcuin's "On the Killing at Lindisfarne," or Hildebert's gloss on *Ecclesiastes* (she entitled it, "The Mood of Vichy")—spirited translations all, fervent, timeless, alarmingly of the hour (Her's—Ours!). To save space I limit myself to a single poignant lyric of Boethius, as beautiful as yesterday—an artifact of translation informed by the heart as well as by the ear:

> This bird was happy once in the high trees.
> You cage it in your cellar, bring it seed,
> Honey to sip, all that its heart can need
> Or human love can think of: till it sees,
> Leaping too high within its narrow room
> The old familiar shadow of the leaves,
> And spurns the seed with tiny, desperate claws.
> Naught but the woods despairing pleads,
> The woods, the woods again, it grieves, it grieves.

Brooding on Helen Waddell's reminder of the fall of empires and the fall of valor, we may find the opening sentence of Miklos Vajda's introduction to his own country's triumphs and distempers somewhat disingenuous.[2] "The background of some of the best poems in this collection is nothing less than five hundred years of unjust and debilitating history, with all its inevitable consequences." Which are the *inevitable* and which the *debilitating* consequences? Hungary as a totalitarian suburb? The worldwide dispersion of talented Hungarians? The fund of poetry written by those who did not disperse?—the quality of which could scarcely have been maintained had history been entirely "debilitating"! With all respect, I think that the Hungarians, even among Central European nations, have no special claim to an "unjust" history. *Everyone* today, obedient to new versions of Apocalypse, sees his own history as "unjust"—Americans not least, who have something less than five hundred years to accuse! Let us agree: Justice is like the concept of a perfect circle, a Platonic figure forever unrealized; then take up Hungarian poetry which has *sometimes* been derived from the imperfection. My general impression—as adequately as I can formulate any that embraces forty-one poets whose poems I am reading in the language of twenty English translators—is one of

[2] MODERN HUNGARIAN POETRY, ed., with an introduction, by *Miklos Vajda*. Columbia University Press. $11.95. Be it noted that the first full-scale translation of Hungarian poetry appeared in French, a 500-page work published in 1962.

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extreme temperamental diversity and vehement romanticism, expressing itself in baroque imagery, embittered by the anti-climaxes of the "historical process" in our century. You can only "free" yourself from history (Malraux's worry), *unjust* or otherwise, by first paying attention to it; hence, freedom *from* it is always conditioned by knowledge. The Hungarian's knowledge seems more often than not to be poised between the sardonic and the cynical.

Of the Forty-One, "roughly grouped into four generations" (the earliest represented, born in the 1880's), only a few came of poetic age under Socialism, have written no odes to it, and "more important than generational classification is the rural *or* urban background." (I am quoting Vajda.) Significantly, a remarkable number of these poets are listed as translators of foreign literature, an impressive range: Shakespeare, Molière, Racine, Thackeray, Mallarmé, Coleridge, Rilke, modern American poets, heaps of others. Consciousness of an imprisoned linguistic life is plainly an obsessive matter when your language has no ties with that of any other country save Finland! Which is why Miklos Vajda's translation project (a ten-year enterprise) is so valuable a contribution (to us and to the poets made available) and why our praise of all the translators should be generous—of, above all, for their unflagging versatility, Edwin Morgan, William Jay Smith, Daniel Hoffman and Alan Dixon. Satisfactory quotation from the many splendid poems is of course impossible within the limits of this review. (I seem to have said that before!) As probably most representative of what (with Arthur Koestler in mind) we think of as the *Budapest* mentality, I would choose István Vas (1910–): history at his elbow; shrewd, skeptical toward his own nostalgia, quick to confess personal irresolution.

> On the opposite bank
> The shapeless frame of the new Intercontinental
> Hides the cold and burned-out gaps of the city.
> And when it is erected, fresh and splendid,
> As a token of peaceful co-existence,
> Symbol of life in the vulgar and beautiful beyond,
> What will the wind bear to Buda, a waltz or
> The world-wildcat music of the electric guitar
> Amplified a year from now
> On the night of Saint Medard?
> And what kind of tawdry beautiful-beyond blend of light
> Will be projected on the dark water of the backward Danube
> And who will watch it leaning from his window toward Pest?
> I'm not even curious.
>
> ("Saint Medard," trans. William Jay Smith)

Ferenc Juhascz (1928–) is at present better known in the English-language countries, owing to Kenneth McRobbie's virtuouso translation of "The Boy Changed into a Stag," which W. H. Auden ventured was "one of the greatest poems written in my time." Since Auden had no Hungarian,

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perhaps he had his fingers crossed behind him! "Power of Flowers" and "Crown of Hatred and Love" are Juhascz at the top of his bent, employing verse or prose, equally torrential, to heap imprecation and elegy on his native village.

> Oh how I hated that village, closing around me like a spined mollusc, each thorn's tip a tenacious leech's mouth, a belly beneath the hard grey shield around its malevolent hideousness like a warhorse's iron head-armor, from whose embossed orifice only the hairy muzzle's flower-whorl protrudes with whetted teeth behind spongy fur-skinned mouth's petals to sink into me, chew up my warm entrails, sip them, suck them, in: this wreath of thorn-mouths woven of a thousand visored horses' heads! . . .
>
> ("Crown of Hatred and Love," trans. Kenneth McRobbie)

All notes, no negative space. Who knows? In Hungarian, the tautology, the compounds, the packed possessives, may work brilliantly. Miklos Vajda knows: he describes Juhascz, accurately enough, as "a myth-maker and self-tormentor."

Diametrically opposite to the dithyrambs and denunciations of Juhascz and, for that matter, in sharp contrast to the eclecticism of the established elders (Gyula Illyes, István Vas, Sandor Weöres), is the scrupulous and disquieting verse of Judit Toth, in superlative translation by Laura Schiff. The poet was born in 1936; both her parents perished in a concentration camp; today she lives in Paris. Two of the three poems chosen by the editor interrogate with impassioned subtlety the fatefulness of life and not-life. They are among a half-dozen poems in this collection I shall most cherish. This is from "To the Newborn":

> To what despair
> do they wake from their indifferent seas?
> This wild crying, this endless
> gasping, a mneme still of their fish-life,
> yet with what a voice
> is their vernal despair blessed.
> They sob, they clamor, they praise,
> hardly alive, they meet with their throats
> the assaults of reality, the million
> afflictions and pleasures of matter.
> And they grab what they clamored for,
> they grasp what every being grasps,
> theirs the air, the earth, the milk,
> the death, the lullaby, the glory.

All told, this volume is a pungent record of the human spirit in our time, counting its losses, eyeing its gains: "the death, the lullaby, the glory."

Macedonia, today a socialist republic, southernmost of those that make up Yugoslavia, has had an even more frustrating linguistic fate than

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Hungary; apart from the question of who else can understand it, the language has been systematically suppressed or relegated since the formation of its alphabet in the ninth century (by Cyril, a Byzantine monk). No vernacular literature in this tongue survives from the Middle Ages or from the first centuries of Turkish domination (after 1389). Of those who struggled and suffered (imprisonment) to establish a Macedonian grammar and to publish Macedonian folk songs in the nineteenth century, the editors of *Reading the Ashes*[3] will inform the reader in greater detail. Sufficient, here, to repeat the essential information that Macedonian officially took its place among the European languages on July 7, 1945. The poems chosen for this volume (all seem to me to be expressed with pristine purity) fall into the principal divisions you might expect: those that sustain the traditional, *pastoral* imagery or folk-epic material and those influenced and sophisticated by modern European writers, among them (oddly consorting, to my mind), T. S. Eliot, Ionesco, Lorca, Edwin Muir! "Social realism" of the Soviet order has never been a serious requirement in the Yugoslav countries, and the predominant strain here is that of the "village culture," now vanished or vanishing; the poems that embody this strain are the ones by which I was most enthralled. (*Les extrêmes se touchent?*) Narrative or lyric, harsh or delicate, they have that unspoiled sensuous quality which I have met in other literatures of Yugoslavia. (There are unforgettably comparable pages in Milovan Djilas's Montenegran novel, *Under the Colors*—British title, *Lost Battles*.) Seldom have I read so many evocative verses about rain, or horses (or "rain-horses"!) or flowers and stones, and the passing of a life (or the passing of a day, as in the sequence by Mateja Mateski, "Morning, Noon and Evening"). Primary colors, qualities and feelings are rampant: blood, flame, gold, darkness, silence, thunder and the sun. The poems are innocently free from the intensely Western assumption: *my* girl, *my* house, *my* peach, *my* grief. Most seem to have been written in an access of joy, even of terrible premonition, that illuminated the earth without any grating intrusion of the ego that composed the commemorations or the sorrow. Ante Popovski (b. 1931), today an editor, writes as if Modernism had never been heard of, as if he had *been there*—at the crushing defeat of Tsar Samuil by the Byzantine ruler, Basil, in 1014. (Tradition has it that every man of the defeated army was blinded; every hundredth was left one eye, to lead his fellows home.)

There was nothing left for man:
The lava rose over the horror,
Overflowing the gulfs,
Leveling the chasms.
The rivers were effaced
By the rock,
    Hard, black rock.

[3] READING THE ASHES: An Anthology of the Poetry of Modern Macedonia, compiled and ed. by *Milne Holton* and *Graham W. Reid*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $3.50 paperback.

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The moon no longer set
Over the axis of the plains
Grain was no longer seen on the threshing floors.
The trees bore rock instead of fruit,
And the peasants took it in their hands like bread.
And instead of children, the pregnant women
brought forth rock.
Hard, black rock

This translation is by John Woodbridge and Carolyn Kizer. All in the book—apocalyptic, lamenting or intimate, read as translucently. "Black Came the Plague," a more baroque diction from an eclectic poet, Bogomil Gjuzel (b. 1939), is conveyed with the appropriate splendor by Edward Gold and Graham W. Reid. But I overrun my limits and can quote only, as a contrast to the above, a fugitive and modest love lyric by Mihail Rendzov (b. 1936), exquisitely rendered by Mr. Reid.

I think of you and put you in a word
The word begins to breathe
A bird flies into your eyes
while I write your name

I think of you and put you in a seed
The seed begins to grow, to bloom
I watch you tremble like a milk doe
while the stars fly from love

I think of you and put you in a book
The book begins to breathe.
("I Think of You")

With Yehudi Amichai[4] we are still among the beleagured peoples, in this case a people with whose fate and accent we are more familiar. An advantage that national resistance and misfortune bestows on a poet is that when speaking for himself, no matter how idiosyncratically, he is speaking for others. His pain is shared; he is community property; he has an audience. Amichai has an attentive and responsive audience in Israel. Yet it seems not to modify his misery; these *are* poems of misery, with occasional flashes of what might be wit, were they not so low-keyed. Like some of the contemporary Macedonians, his sentiment is ethnic and ancient, his use of simile modern-international—strangely naive at times, flat when isolated from the context; in the poem it passes. "I dreamt about you. My dream was like/ a great vaulted worry inside a railway station/hall in London . . . We were so near to each other/Like numbers in a lottery. . . ." Amichai was born, 1924, in Wurzburg (a city subsequently destroyed—gratuitously—by American bombs, in a half-hour!), emi-

[4] AMEN, by *Yehuda Amichai*. Trans. from the Hebrew by the author and *Ted Hughes*. Harper & Row. $7.95.

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grated to Israel in 1936. He survived the War (two wars), to conclude, by the evidence of his poems, that survival is as bitter as extinction. As he sums up, in his cycle of "Patriotic Songs"—an acrid misnomer—the town he was born in was effaced; the ship on which he sailed to Israel was sunk; the barn near Ismaila where he made love was burned down. "Thus my life is wiped out behind me according to/an exact map." Ted Hughes claims that the "translations" were made by the poet. "All I did was correct the more intrusive oddities and errors of grammar. . . . What I wanted to preserve was the tone and cadence of Amichai's own voice speaking in English. . . ." Amichai's voice is not especially ingratiating; one can't be ingratiating and inconsolable at the same time. His poems have something of the worms-and-futility of I. B. Singer, without Singer's compensatory exuberance and passionate participation in the swarm of comic humanity. Cadence is Amichai's power, as Hughes rightly points out and preserves—in this crescendo, for instance, which rises from passivity to a reverberating disgust and subsides again, like the wailing of one who passes and disappears in a desert at night.

> All those stones, all this sorrow.
> all this light, debris of night hours, ash of noon,
> all those twisted pipes of holiness,
> walls and towers, rusty halos,
> all prophecies which couldn't hold back, like old men,
> all sweaty wings of angels, all
> stinking candles, all this false tourism,
> dung of redemption, bliss and testicles,
> garbage of nothingness, bomb and time.
>
> All this dust, all these dead bones
> in the process of resurrection and of wind,
> all this love, all these
> stones, all this sorrow.

And with all these stones and sorrows belling in my ears, tolled by resonant translators, Alexander Solzhenitsyn by way of Robert Conquest is a lame and discordant interjection.[5] As a man, as a witness, as a polemicist, Solzhenitsyn is one of the great souls of our time; he strives—in vain, I sometimes fear—to keep awake the nodding conscience of the as yet unpolluted. Yet every time I turn to his fictions I am rebuffed by their ineptitude, by his inability to give credible shape to the story he tells or to furnish it with characters who sound and "look" like people. Impossible to believe that *everyone* who translates him is at fault! But on this occasion I must complain that Robert Conquest has belied his name and faintheartedly surrendered to whatever difficulties were originally inherent. *Prussian Nights* is a narrative poem the author is supposed to have memorized in prison camp years ago; later he wrote it out. It concerns a captain

[5] PRUSSIAN NIGHTS, by *Alexander Solzhenitsyn*. Trans. by *Robert Conquest*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $8.95.

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in a Soviet Russian brigade, burning and looting its way into Germany, 1945; how he disapproves of his comrades' barbarisms but is finally driven, by the elations and hungers of the hour, into complicity (of a sort) and the seesaw emotions of remorse and self-justification. It might have been a short prose story, kept at a cruel distance, like those of Isaac Babel; it might have been *anything,* from a crisp anecdote to a documentary novel. Solzhenitsyn chose to make of it a rhymed-verse narrative and Robert Conquest persisted in translating this into an English similitude: the result is unhearable awkward, hence totally without conviction from any perspective. Listen to this if you can:

> Once he took an old German to a wood
> And shot him down there in cold blood.
> One word would have prevented that! . . .
> I was nearby . . . but in the heat
> Of battles, in the thick of hell,
> Who knows who's guilty? Who can tell?
> But from what distance can one judge? Is
> It easier after centuries?

Helen Waddell, defending *free* translation, quoted Evarigus of Antioch. "Direct word-for-word translation darkens the sense and strangles it, even as spreading couchgrass a field of corn. . . . Let the rest go batfowling for letters and syllables: do you seek the sense." For Conquest, the obvious solution would have been the devising of a free-verse form sufficiently flexible to carry the impetus of an advancing narrative while allowing for parenthetical ruminations, snatches of dialogue, expositions of military routine. The paradigm of such a solution lies close to my hand: William Jay Smith's translation of *Nagyszombat 1704,* by Istvan Vas; on a related subject. (*Op. cit.,* p. 80 ff.)

On another "side" of the earth (sometimes she sounds as if on another side of the moon—but so many Deep South writers do!), Dara Weir[6] uses language with a meticulous, almost fanatical regard for its denotative value, declining to coax her idioms into a facile symbolism, no sooner read than apprehended. If any poems refute W. C. Williams' oft-quoted principle, "No poetry but in things" (or its later variant, "No poetry but in facts"), they might be these of Dara Weir, which *appear* to be constructed from the factual alone, excluding any ideal extension. They seem merely additive, as if written by Faulkner's Popeye, until you read farther than the single image, or the one following.

> The chalk-legged woman pets her cereal.
> Her silver spoon, a leaden boat that strokes
> the seed, the milk gently wakes.
> A room away a man lies dying.

[6] BLOOD HOOK AND EYE, by *Dara Weir.* University of Texas Press. $7.95; $3.95 paperback.

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Sun runs the rooftar black.
She bites an apple, the apple
keeps her teeth.
A mockingbird squawks with a squirrel.
. . . . . .
She gums the rice into mush.
His pillow is a leech.
He grits his teeth.
Everything looks good for nothing.
("A Room Away a Man Lies Dying")

Against Williams I would quote Joseph Conrad—"the road to legitimate realism is through poetical feeling." No *fact* in this poem (I've omitted two stanzas) is unconditioned by the sensibility that selected it. The poem *tells a story.* "Everything looks good for nothing." To whom? the dying man? the woman? the mocking-bird (nature's clown who taunts the provider)? the poet? No direct simile is involved, but the woman's silver spoon (was she born with one in her mouth?) is now a *leaden* boat that "strokes the seed," a negatively procreative image followed by that of the gently waking milk—both images sardonic: "A room away a man lies dying"; no birth, no future here where "Sun [merely] runs the rooftar black" and the woman biting the apple is no Eve; she has false teeth. The dying man grits his as the mocking-bird squawks.

David Wevill's fine appreciation of Dara Weir, on the jacket, is worth a quibble. Asserting that she "has an eye for the details and the bones of situations," he tends to overlook the circumstance that no objectively framed situation exists, whole, before her eyes, of which she has observed "details"; she has invented (recalled? it doesn't matter!) a situation which is inseparable *from* its details; the details—*elements* might be the preferred word—*are* the bones and the bones are the situation; they are not markedly subordinate to a structure which is palpably more than its bones.

Below New Orleans the Mississippi
runs by my family house. Cypress
knees, *boscayo*, nudge the floor boards.
Screened galleries shut out mosquito,
horsefly, moccasin. From the water
the snakes crawled to the stoop.

We stuffed moss in to close up splits.
The moss, sucking air, held small clouds
of water and the eggs of sparrows.
Here typhoid took my mother's hair,
anthrax my grandfather's back.
My uncle's stomach rotted out, nerves,
and an ax cracked down his skull.
("Complaints")

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Every poet has an eye for some sort of detail. The kind for which Dara Weir has trained here eye, or memory—which may be another way of saying the kind by which her awareness is obsessed—is of a singular kind when compared with details collected by other poets. And she does have an "ultimate" subject, sponsoring all those malevolent details. In another age or clime she would have written, "Golden lads and girls all must/Like chimney sweepers come to dust." Blood, hook and eye. Blood is the deceptive fluid, in her lugubrious view. "You believe the flesh/is not wasting but building," *but*—"There's no pulling the wool over death's iron eye./Quick as the blind pig's wink wool weaves a hood. . . ." With hook and eye you dress yourself to pretend immortality and "the dying become liars. . . . If you get to keep the teeth that's enough./That's something." A Sappho of decomposition, Dara Weir will not provide the solace for which you may have been looking but within my American reading she is one of the most original female poets who has made debut since Sylvia Plath.

Eugene Ruggles,[7] like Dara Weir whom he doesn't at all resemble, could have taken his text from Theodore Roethke (whom neither of these poets resembles!): "Myself is what I wear/I keep the spirit spare." Ruggles' poems are obviously those of a man, still young, who has had to earn every inch of his way and every ounce of his talent. The ordeal has been a strop on which he has keened his temper and sharpened his language. Like the poems of Phillip Levine, his are humorless, as if the one thing Ruggles hadn't been able to afford in his struggle for articulation was a moment in which to smile. The poems recall a hard life, protest in smoldering rage or recall sensuous moments with more precision than pleasure. "Memories tighten like thirst in this sun,/as if they were tied down with leather." A child of his generation and his background for whom the objects of outrage are the familiar ones—the Vietnam war, the ecological waste, marginal poverty—Ruggles otherwise responds most powerfully to the outdoors, to the eternal elements, among which he can un-tighten his memories and wear something beside himself.

> She [The White Goddess] has placed the wind about me
> like a shirt without a seam,
> and told me that the words
> like men, should have weather in them.

The weather in his words is least inclement when he summons the gratuitous interludes: lying in a mountain stream, remembering the bucolic childhood, mother churning butter, "shocks of corn filling/with thick layers of moonlight, like women . . ." or, in a vision sired by D. H. Lawrence, his father's team of horses pulling a mountainous hay-load "up the last hill toward the barn . . ."

[7] THE LIFEGUARD IN THE SNOW by *Eugene Ruggles*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $6.95; $2.95 paperback.

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the August heat swarms to them,
its light is buried in the wells
of their thighs,
their legs are rope and bone
and their deep chests nearly measure
the front of their hay wagon,

they stretch out into their strength
until their stomachs are near the ground,
they love their great bodies
and the silent flow between them . . .
("The Horses")

The marks of growth are on these poems, like lines in a maturing face. Intent on achieving the sanity of detachment without surrendering compassion or commitment, Ruggles hunts down metaphors that will best project his grievance or his grief and perhaps endure for a little while as poems in their own right. This one should endure.

There are fires in northern Canada
that have been burning for years
uncontrollable, and far out of reach.

They feed back and forth on the tundra,
their flanks torn open by swamps,
followed by packs of cold and darkness.

They drink up the sound of any wind,
leaving the silence of burnt ash
to fertilize the dead grass after them.

Smoke hovers behind like a huge gray ear
and moves on, dragging a shade without trees.
Shavings of hair gather about the stumps.

They can be reached only by airplane.
Or by learning how to sleep here, tonight,
in this light still moving above our nation.
("Thinking of the Last War")

Clearing, by Wendell Berry,[8] has none of Eugene Ruggles' muscular tension or the bitterroot taste. This is a different kind of poem, as Berry is another kind of poet. The subject is kin, however: the waste of earth and one man's restitution of the waste. *Clearing* is familiar history; ecology; memoir: a poem about the making of a poem—the making of two poems,

[8] CLEARING, by *Wendell Berry*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $6.95; $2.95 paperback.

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the one we read and the other: a farm and forty acres which the poet and his wife bought in 1965 and reverdured (the word is Berry's) by the toil of their hands.

> My subjects are my objects
> house, barn, beast, hill, and tree.
> Reader, make no mistake. The meanings
> of these must balance against their weight.

Berry is the most subtle of American naturists. The vocabulary of his emotion is even-tempered; far from unpoetic, he deprecates the more showy forensics that have commonly underlined his subject: despoliation and the way back. *Clearing* is a ruminating lyrical monologue in seven principal sections, delivered by a man who has chosen at great cost—in the worldly meaning, beside the expense of spirit entailed—to *do* as well as to *be* or to talk: actively to conserve, not be content with polemics on conservation. And the consequence—never *achieved,* always in process of achievement—is far from satisfying the poet who thinks, as it does satisfy the man who toils. "Work Song," the most troubled, and the most musical, sequence of the narrative, discloses the anxiety at the heart of Berry's expenditure—anxious not only for the future, which will not be in his hands; anxious over the present in which he is being devoured by his own commitment. His introspective misgiving was fed by a passion—"an ancient passion singing/in my veins, beneath speech . . . beyond the words of books," which led him to stand on an October hillside, "critical/and solitary, like a horse dumbly/approving of the grass,/ the world as clear as light,/ as dark as dark. . . ." *Beyond the words of books.* There lies the poet's fear, as dark as dark. He has cut the brush, fenced and sown the fields, brought crops back to the bottom land, and he asks if his labors might not, eventually, absorb him, lead him quite away from the life of books, from reading them, from making them.

> I am curious and afraid
> one day my poems may pass
> through my mind unwritten,
> like the freshenings of a stream
> in the hills, holding the light
> only while they pass, shaping
> only what they pass through
> . . . . . .
> Some days I wait here
> empty as a tree
> whose birds and leaves
> have gone. And I know my words
> have gone in search of things.
> They are hunting the song
> that will celebrate the absence
> of what does not belong.

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No fate more mocking than to be halved between one's vocations; to be torn asunder by equally compelling duties; no worse despair than a writer's when not writing what he feels he ought. *Clearing* is thereby more than a lyric of ecological resurrection, though it is beautifully that; it is the expressive chronicle of a man who sought unity, stricken by division.

No ecological thesis, nor indeed any *argument,* sustains the musical topography of John Engels' effulgent verse:[9] it is frankly apotheosis, invocation and high spirits, with here and there a dash of histrionic self-slaughter (whipped up, no doubt, to keep the poet's charm from becoming monochrome): Dionysian pastorals engendered by a New England landscape, by Elizabethan echoes (see, e.g. "West Topham"), by love and time, by sudden falterings of confidence which are swiftly reconciled without inhibiting the poet's lyric elation.

> Love,
> I would have lengthened our lives till
> the trees spring green again forever,
> and the flight of snow geese is high
> in the floury blue mornings.
> But our bodies walk on their bones
> and are busy and clearly
> outlive all evidence of breath.
> And now the snow flies
> after the first warm days. The lie
> is bought back, there are between us now
> so many awakenings, watery clouds and floods,
> turnings of trees, yard soils heaved
> by frosts and moles, trout
>
> risen to flies, bodies risen
> and laid down again, and snow
> laid down as if the resuming breaths
> of all of us who sleep in fear of season
> freeze in the inclement glass.
> ("A May Snowstorm")

There have been many fine lyrical salutes to the green world (and the white world) by American poets. I know of none that for sheer *brio* surpass this. (Note, by the way, that *floury* in the fifth line above is not a misprint; it was the poet's inspiration!)

For me, the marvel is Engels' ability to transform the state of Vermont (which I see in my mind's eye as a categorical postcard view, everything in its place, neatly rural, pinned down by rock and fences, "froze," as it were, even in summer)—his ability to transform this static equilibrium into a landscape of Van Gogh, one of stresses and strains, elemental

[9] BLOOD MOUNTAIN, by *John Engels.* University of Pittsburgh Press. $6.95; $2.95 paperback.

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upheaval, evanescent weathers. " . . . the planet/ swells and bulges and protrudes beyond my eyes' aversion. . . ." Blood Mountain, whether or not a place on the map, is the poet's idiomatic Parnassus, his Castalian Spring, his pivot and stay. Most of these poems are of dreams and the best are dreams that embrace, then free themselves from, hallucination, dark or exotic adventures of the mind, which Engels seems to need in order to resolve them by coming back to local earth. In *Bad Weather on Blood Mountain* he imagines that he is a climber on Mount Everest, "torn from his holds/ and swept by the terrible snow plumes of the Summit." His mask is carried away and his "eyes frozen instantly into a million perfectly hexagonal/lenses of ice"; one by one "the fingers crack . . . at the knuckles, and break away. . . ." Buried by the wind he is soon breathing snow and imagines that "for all time" Everest will erupt under him, "roaring with ice and snow. . . . And then, thank God . . ." comes the reversal; the sky above Blood Mountain shows gold; the wind turns.

> It is a great relief,
> and you are happy because you know that in a few hours
> you can see again over a northern forest of beech and maple,
> leaves mostly shed, the colors of rock and lichen. You tell yourself
> this is a hard climate, but not relentless. You hesitate
> on the steep hard spine of the trail, wanting to go neither up
> nor down, and then the rain stops entirely, and directly
> before you, thrust up through a sudden towering of white clouds,
> the sun appears, and it is trailing a great wind plume of
> gold and yellow fires, and still you cannot decide.

I am equally impressed, on another part of the mountain,[10] by the poems of James Richardson. *Reservations* is a first volume of complete stylistic assurance, the burden of which—but you mustn't read this too solemnly—is the tenuity of assurance when we attempt to apprehend and evaluate the phenomena, banal or crucial, that constitute our assumed existence.

> When, after their fashion, the jackets,
> shirts and trousers fold up, or cling
> to the lean past, or embarrass themselves
> out of existence, the ties still hang around.
>
> Listening at the backs of doors, frozen
> against the walls of closets, they can
> never be disowned. We seem to know
> that it is useless to try to forget.
>
> When each disguise is abandoned as hopeless,
> they are the weight around our necks. Their minds,

[10] RESERVATIONS, by *James Richardson*. Princeton University Press. $7.50; $2.95 paperback.

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narrow or broad, their careers, checkered
or solid, were ours, and we are dismayed

to find that they always fit. Just when we thought
we had changed, there they are, signposts
of rigidity, racks of humiliations:
the motley, waiting for each new man.
("The Family of Ties")

We often praise the poet for *naming* things. There are poets of another color. They *divest* things, and events, of their nomenclature, the better to confront us with a harrowing diversity of shades and probabilities. Richardson draws suggestive inferences from our commonplace habits, such as wearing a necktie, or from the melodrama of our crash-landing culture: the ransom note, a commando, losing control of our brakes, "a blinded jet" burning on a mountain slope. I should quickly insist that these are only the "triggering" subjects (to borrow a term from Richard Hugo). The expanded subject is often more difficult to overtake; this may well *be* the real subject: the impossibility of arriving at it! There, the poet speaks for himself with greater authority than I have acquired on short acquaintance. "The poems are elegies for everything, including myself. Beyond this, I cannot pretend to be certain of much about them. I suppose they reflect a self with only a tenuous grip on its surroundings, threatened by their (and its own) continuous vanishing. The poems respond with a helplessness, fitful control, and not a little tenderness. . . ." I can't improve on that, except to point out that Richardson's modesty fails to stress the perfect grace and profile of his diction (control is anything but fitful!) and the renewed evidence that not only does good poetry communicate before it is fully understood (I have it by heart!); it continues to communicate, though *never* understood! It may be some time before I am unarguably able to identify the *you* in this passage, from "Elegy For a Deaf Mute."

. . . Of you I know
nothing after that night. I
don't say I have never been the same
since. I have been the same. I see
that I have always been the same.
I hear nothing but what
you never said. I speak only what
you will never hear. The same.
When the wind lies down, and the silence
turns me to the trees,
I go to you. The fields rehearsed
in emptiness are you.
Salmon break against you. Convoys
of headlit cars are nearing
you. No one mentions what becomes of you.

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Nothing becomes of you.
Everything comes of you. I do not know.
I do not want to know.

As Richardson says, in another part of this poem,

I must have been blind to have seen,
once, some tall assurance
spearheading claims one certain way.

"Tall assurance" is also lacking in Philip Dacey:[11] an engaging deficiency! From a poet who begins a Thank You letter to Ariadne, "Thank you for the thread. It worked/ just fine," you can expect almost anything. And from Dacey you get almost everything, even an explanation of how he *did* escape from the labyrinth, in a poem of eight well chosen words.

It was easy
I kept losing my way.

Losing his way is Dacey's occupational asset and to lose one's way with him is to experience multiple amusements and to glimpse some of the finer terrors that lie just beyond the reach of wit. A not too unhappy skeptic, Dacey manages to contain vice, incongruity and catastrophe within an epigrammatic art of equivocation. "The man drowning" (in his poem, "Water") is far from despair. "Going down,/ it is not what you think/ at all. This is a place/ to live—/ I am convincing myself./ Each strange shape/I see/I make into something familiar." And in reverse, Dacey, like Richardson in this respect, or John Morris, makes of the familiar a strange shape. Among his poems are spooky cerebrations: "The Unicorn"; "The Operation"; "The Perfectionist"; "The Obscene Caller". Others are what I call anachronistic identifications—the past, of myth or history, recaptured with a twentieth-century grin (cf. Auden, Lowell, Hecht): Ariadne, as cited above; Jack the Giant-Killer "afterwards"; "The Black Death"; King Mark stabbing Tristan. Many are derived from the sillier substantives of the consumer society: pornography, the "Chain Letter," "Looking at Models in the Sears Catalogue"—"These are our immortals/ They stand around/and always look happy . . ." To represent Dacey with something more than fragments I have chosen the first stanza of "Form Rejection Letter," partly because it meets my space requirement, mainly because I place a high value on authentic personification, with a smile.

We are sorry we cannot use the enclosed.
We are returning it to you.
We do not mean to imply anything by this.
We would prefer not to be pinned down about this matter.

[11] HOW I ESCAPED FROM THE LABYRINGTH AND OTHER POEMS, by *Philip Dacey*. Carnegie-Mellon University Press. $3.95 paperback.

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But we are not keeping—cannot, will not keep—
what you sent us.
We did receive it, though, and our returning it to you
is a sign of that.
It was not that we minded your sending it to us
unasked.
That is happening all the time, they
come when we least expect them,
when we forget we have needed or might yet need them,
and we send them back.
We send this back.
It is not that we minded.
At another time, there is no telling . . .
But this time, it does not suit our present needs.

Ann Stanford brings us halfway back to Helen Waddell.[12] Given other opportunities, other inclinations, she too might have been a Latinist with a poet's conscience. Classic in more than the idle sense, she takes her stand outside herself; while the human is always at the center of her work, even in her landscapes without figures or her bestiary pieces, she writes with no intention of self-disclosure. Her poems are classical both in the verbal and passionate meanings of the term: the usual words for unusual situations; a sparing use of simile or the dramatizing adjective; the terrible, structured by dramatic irony from a mind cool in inverse ratio to the warmth of feeling it proposes to reveal. To be effective without being rhetorical argues a degree of bridled intensity, especially notable in certain passages of *The Women of Perseus*—the equable surface, the undermusic of scorn and violence, as in *Medusa*.

The prisoner of myself, I long to lose
the serpent hair, the baleful eyes, the face
twisted by fury that I did not choose.
I'd like to wake up in another place,
look for my self again, but there recur
thoughts of the god and his misdeed always—
the iron arm, the fall, the marble floor
the stinking breath, the sweaty weight, the pain,
the quickening thrust.

And now the start,
the rude circling blood-tide not my own
that squirms and writhes, steals from me bone by bone—
his monster seed growing beneath my heart,
prisoned within my prison, left alone,
despised, uncalled for, turning my blood to stone.

"Left alone, despised, uncalled for" is the fate (or so they believe), of

[12] IN MEDITERRANEAN AIR, by *Ann Stanford*. Viking. $5.95.

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many characters in the Stanford poems: all the women of Perseus, the Graeae, an anchorite living on honeycombs "in the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius," Benvenuto Cellini in "The Artist Underground," and the Outsider in her extraordinary title sequence, "In Mediterranean Air." For this group, she conceived the idea of a spy who would like, pitifully, to come in from the cold and share the warmth and society of those upon whom he is spying. (This is the *operative* subject, the John Le Carré gambit; her design moves toward the big awkward questions—"How do I fit in?" "Why am I here?") Her variations on the predicament of this forlorn and knowing antagonist are played with attractive ingenuity, a tangible feel of the setting and a pervasive touch of pathos.

> Last night the birds outside had their feathers ruffed all right!
> Cold as six pigeons! Beer froze on pantry shelves.
> Do they know how I feel out here alone?
> What if I went away? Who'd care for their pas de deux.
> It's only for me
> they bolt the iron-studded door at night
> pull the rotten drapes near the terrace
> and embrace under the lamps by the upstairs window.
>
> It's like marriage. What a waste if I left them!
> They pretend to hide messages while I am watching,
> or half-burn a paper, throw the rest in the fireplace;
> they laugh while I sift their ashes
> for a scrap of *Die Zeitung* faintly underlined.
> They are my life. I love them. They hate one another.
>
> ("Outside")

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Adorable Ideas and Absent Plenitudes

THE BEAUTY PART IS THAT WHEN I COME RIGHT DOWN TO IT I'm nobody's baby but my own! says the book. Writers are obsolete, man is fading fast, semes and bytes are in the saddle, everything reads like a bad translation from the French. Last year Northrop Frye became the first structuralist President of the Modern Language Association and in his Presidential Address launched his mission to the home folks: welcomed the "suggestion" by "some critics" that "the unconscious . . . is linguistically structured"; hailed without naming its foreign perpetrator the Barthean "zero degree of writing" and deciphered it with unscrupulous inaccuracy into something warmly familiar (French-Fryed Blake—"where the literary and all its conventions disappear and only the pure prophetic vision is left"); saluted "the authority of the word speaking for itself"; and disclaimed his books, royalties, academic salary, and Presidential Address. None of it would have happened if one day Rimbaud hadn't wearied of explaining his poems to tourists and said, " *'Je' est un autre*": " 'I' is another." "You *is*?" cried Verlaine in a jealous rage as he drew his revolver and opened fire. " 'I' *ain't*," retorted Rimbaud, gone in a flash and rematerializing on the next boat-train to Africa where he spent the rest of his life dancing chic to sheik. Unfortunately his careless remarks were overheard by a professor who started a religion whose votaries at this very moment commandeer the lecterns like mad custodians announcing on campus platforms everywhere that "we" is the zero degree of absolutely nowhere:

> The human sciences, which begin by making man an object of knowledge, find, as their work advances, that "man" disappears under structural analysis. "The goal of the human sciences," writes Lévi-Strauss, "is not to constitute man but to dissolve him." . . . Michel Foucault argues . . . "that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a simple fold in our knowledge, and that he will disappear as soon as that knowledge has found a new form."[1]

"Subjectivity," says Roland Barthes, "is a plenary image . . . whose deceptive plenitude is merely the wake of all the codes which constitute me, so that my subjectivity has ultimately the generality of stereotypes"[2] (though I *resembles* plenitude I is really all platitude): in short, man (if Barthes may be considered representative) is boring and outmoded if not defunct; and Jacques Derrida, worrywart extraordinary, frets himself into

[1] STRUCTURALIST POETICS, by *Jonathan Culler*. Cornell University Press. $4.95 paperback.

[2] S/Z, by *Roland Barthes*. Trans. by *Richard Miller*. Hill and Wang. $8.95.

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a Yeatsian pipedream that not only man but even structuralism is on the brink of being superseded by the slope-sided glitch:

> . . . we are only glimpsing today the *conception*, the *formation*, the *gestation*, the *labor*. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the business of childbearing—but also with a glance toward those who, in a company from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away in the face of the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.[3]

When the French get heavy, they make the Germans look like ballerinas.

"Paris is terrorized by its intellectuals," writes Jane Kramer in her Letter from Paris in *The New Yorker* of July 4, 1977. "Roland Barthes has just written an alphabet of love called 'Fragments d'un Discours Amoureux,' and Parisians are busy discussing the plenitude of absence and the idea of the adorable. Michel Foucault is two volumes into a five-volume disquisition on the categories of sexuality which, with luck, should take him several years." What is sex but a recent invention? a simple fold in our knowledge? the formless, mute, and infant form of fashion? A decade ago Barthes published a structuralist study of fashion called *Système de la Mode*; and Jonathan Culler, self(if you'll pardon the expression)-appointed Anglo-American protégé and epigone of these operators, reverently summarizes its argument, which to anybody who has never in his life looked at a fashion ad in *The New Yorker* or anywhere else might come as a surprise:

> Reflexive verbs make the garments themselves agents of their stylishness (. . . *Dresses are becoming longer; Black mink asserts itself*). The arbitrary decisions about what shall be fashionable are concealed by a rhetoric which does not name the agents responsible, which takes effects and, concealing their causes, treats them as facts that have been observed or as phenomena which develop in accordance with some independent and autonomous process. . . .

In other words the writer of fashion ads, whose personal presence in the ads is so obvious that his efforts to conceal it have to be noticed even by a structuralist, proves to be a structuralist himself who treats his texts exactly as Barthes treats literary texts, as for example Barthes treats Balzac's *Sarrasine* with stupefying charm and repetitiveness in *S/Z*, where the arbitrary decisions about what shall be literature are concealed by a rhetoric which does not name the agent responsible, which takes the novella's effects and treats them as phenomena developing in accordance with some independent and autonomous process ("the authority of the word speaking for itself"), and which couldn't fool even an ad-writer. So *Système de la Mode* may have been Barthes's premature confession that he's

[3] THE STRUCTURALIST CONTROVERSY, ed. by *Richard Macksey* and *Eugenio Donato*. Johns Hopkins University Press. $3.95 paperback.

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jiving us and man isn't dead after all but only hiding out on Madison Avenue behind Foster Grant shades and a Sassoon hairstyling. Meanwhile an ambitious novice like Culler is encouraged by the hullabaloo to try to conceal his harrowingly obvious personal presence behind the independent and autonomous process of literature no less (because what human being would be responsible for such stuff?): "To recognize that there is in this respect a continuity within the novel—between Flaubert and Robbe-Grillet, between Sterne and Sollers—does not free us to abandon the notion of *jouissance* as a rapture of dislocation produced by ruptures or violations of intelligibility."

For structuralism asks us to bear in mind while Culler violates his ruptures that the critic isn't just a critic, he—or it—is equally a creator (Barthes: "we have today a new perspective of consideration which . . . is common . . . to the creator and the critic, whose tasks . . . are beginning to interrelate, perhaps even to merge"; President Frye: "perhaps the real motivation in literary scholarship is . . . some sense behind it of an identity of criticism and creation, . . . of the search for knowledge and the production of vision"). Criticism, which has been known to originate in envy of the novelist or poet ("the Author— . . . that somewhat decrepit deity of the old criticism," says Barthes), sometimes ends in competition: "the seme [of Wealth] is 'cited'; we," says Barthes plurally, two for the price of one, new critic plus decrepit deity, "would like to give this word its tauromachian meaning: the *citar* is the stamp of the heel, the torero's arched stance which summons the bull to the banderilleros." "Wow!" exclaims *tout Paris*, marveling at the plenitude of bull. Time wounds all heels. Cynosure of roaring thousands, suavely poised with arched eyebrows at the center of the logomachian arena, Barthes's bull-thrower awaits forever the moment of truth.

S/Z intends to sink the pretensions of the "classic text" by subjecting an instance of it, Balzac's *Sarrasine*, to the full battery of structural analysis.[4] Barthes detests the "classic text"—all fiction written earlier than Robbe-Grillet and Company—because it "impose[s] a dense plenitude of meaning or, if one prefers, a certain redundancy, a kind of semantic prattle typical of the archaic—or infantile—era of modern discourse, marked by the excessive fear of failing to communicate meaning . . . whence, in reaction, . . . our latest—or 'new'—novels . . . [which] state the event without accompanying it with its signification." As for *Sarrasine* in particular, it's a trivial and well-made mystery-story with an enormous number of clues (which Barthes mistakes for meanings) and one ultimate solution (which Barthes mistakes for meaning): castration, which gets mentioned on almost every page of Barthes's commentary and which probably represents the plenitude of absence. The mystery-writer's bag of tricks is, then, the master-critic's clue to the deficiencies of the classic text:

> A classic narrative always gives this impression: the author first

[4] Very technical, full of marks and abbreviations, like a railroad timetable:
(305) "*Come.*"
She led the Frenchman along several back streets ★ ACT. "Route": 1:to set out ★★ ACT. "Route": 2: to walk along. ★★★ REF. Mysterious and romantic Italy (back streets).

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> conceives the signified (or the generality) and then finds for it, according to the chance of his imagination, "good" signifiers, probative examples; the classic author is like an artisan bent over the workbench of meaning and selecting the best *expressions* for the concept he has already formed. For instance, *timidity*: one selects the sound of a champagne cork, a story of a snake, a story of highwaymen. However, the signifying imagination is even more profitable if it fills a double function; it then endeavors to produce doubly articulated signs, committed to that solidarity of notations which defines the readerly; for instance, *impiety*: one could be content to represent the subject playing games in church, but it is a greater art to link impiety to the child's vocation (by showing Sarrasine whittling licentious pieces during Mass) or to contrast it with La Zambinella's superstition (which makes Sarrasine laugh); for sculpture and pusillanimity belong to different narrative networks, and the closer and better calculated the anastomosis of the signifiers, the more the text is regarded as "well written."

Here, for example, is Balzac describing Sarrasine's childhood: "When a fight broke out between him and a friend, the battle rarely ended without bloodshed. If he was the weaker of the two, he would bite"; and here is Barthes's gloss: "Femininity (*to bite*, rather than to use the phallic fist, is a connotator of femininity)." Barthes sees nothing here but meaning (though there isn't even meaning, only clues). No doubt he would see nothing but meaning (or clues) in still another story about a Mediterranean temperament with teeth, those connotators of femininity and the *vagina dentata* if not of uninhibited masculine aggressiveness or of the artist fixing his unsemely byte on the phallic plenitude of the world:

> Not only the musical phrase that came out different from what he expected upset him: *anything* that wasn't as he expected it to be upset him. Once, in a temper, he dug his hands into the pockets of his jacket so violently that he tore them away. He made a tremendous effort to control himself, turning his back to us and saying: "No, Toscanini, no! *Calmo—calmo—calmo*!" Then he began to conduct again; but the passage went no better; and in renewed anger he started to dig his hands into his pockets again, but found they weren't there, since he had torn them away. This new frustration made him so furious that he began to tear the jacket itself to pieces. Another time he attempted to break his stick; but this one only bent and wouldn't break; and this made him so angry that he began to bite it. . . .[5]

But the musician's anecdote has nothing to do with Barthes's meanings and clues, it's the manifestation of a presence, in this case historical and documented, a presence as pristine as the great fictional presences that Barthes hasn't a clue to and that Balzac's novella with its linear suspense and didacticism doesn't seem to have heard of.

[5] Fred Zimmermann, quoted in B. H. Haggin, *The Toscanini Musicians Knew* (Horizon Press, 1967), p. 47.

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These demon readers profess to ignore mere referents (Barthes jeers at the "totalitarian ideology of the referent") for the sake of sticking with the very word; but in practice they are all explainers and interpreters, as satisfied with stamped self-addressed messages as any Yale professor. The first approved "critical interpretation" that Culler quotes at length in his structuralist manual is Harold Bloom's Eng-Lit 1 unriddling of "Ah! Sunflower" ("Blake's dialectical thrust at asceticism . . ."), by the poet who has just the right credentials—joy, love, nakedness, symbols, dialectical thrusts at asceticism—for attracting the attention of academics who may never have heard of structuralism but are into crossword puzzles and hydrotherapy. Riddles are more fun but the very word will do if it fits into twenty-three across. As for Barthes, he gets as far from words as fast as he can: in *S/Z* distinguishes five "codes" comprising the complete inventory of platitudes that he brings to his reading ("*I* is not an innocent subject, anterior to the text. . . . This 'I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost . . ."), codes that he finds reflected in every text he reads; and much the most important for him is the "hermeneutic" (lit-crit as Easter-egg and jellybean hunt), the unriddling or problem-solving code, the code that cracks the code of the story and shatters all the words for the sake of answers, solutions, referents, meanings (though he has a separate code of "semes"—"meanings"—to which he consigns what might be more properly listed under some such rubric as Mention the First Word that Pops into Your Head When I Say the Following: e.g. "to bite" suggests "Femininity"; "the clink of gold" suggests "Wealth"; and on and on with comparable *trouvailles*).

Hermeneutic, protatic, proairetic, aphanisis: the structuralists are obliged by their scientific consciences to use what they regard as a technical language (technical languages are by definition painstakingly referential, but that's another problem), but they all hanker after the lost paradise of "ordinary language"—"All technical languages can be translated into ordinary languages, but ordinary language can never be translated into a technical language" (Jean Hyppolite, quoting Hjelmslev, in *The Structuralist Controversy*); "there is no meta-language. . . . You cannot teach a course in mathematics using only letters on the board. It is always necessary to speak an ordinary language that is understood" (Jacques Lacan). But it doesn't occur to them that "ordinary language" is another way of saying "literature"—i.e. language that can never be translated into a technical language, theirs or anybody else's. Literature exchanges confidences with literature only, and scientific criticism is for the birds.

One of the obstacles to discussing these high-flyers is their incapacity to think straight, so that it's essential to do some surreptitious tidying up before it's possible to say what or even whether they think. Barthes doesn't know what meaning is (though he oracularly intones, "The meaning is as follows . . ."), but as between word and meaning he'll take the word every time (whatever *that* means). But, "interpreting" *Sarrasine*, he provides a flagrant and book-length *explication de texte* (of course he explicitly denies it's an *explication de texte*, for which, if they weren't all doing it, he'd be drummed out of the club) which consists of nothing but meanings as he

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conceives them (i.e. clues and solutions): "To read is to find meanings," and the more meanings the better. But the many meanings of the classic text are too *domestic*: it is "replete: like a cupboard where meanings are shelved, stacked, safeguarded . . . ; like a pregnant female. . . ." But the trouble with *Sarrasine* and all other "classic texts" (*Clarissa, Pride and Prejudice, Barchester Towers, Madame Bovary, Great Expectations, The Idiot, Anna Karenina, Sons and Lovers*) is that they don't have *enough* meanings (their "pluralism" is "limited"); they are like "classical music," which is limited by tonality but which, especially *Italian* classical music, is "like seminal fluid" and offers "the liquid plenitude of pleasure" and—therefore?—inspires Barthes to a veritable coloratura aria (which, it may not be seemly to suggest, may or may not suggest the counter-seminal seme of Castration or Femininity):

> What stands out, what flashes forth, what emphasizes and impresses are the semes, the cultural citations [:*citar*:torero's arched heel coming down like cymbal(symbol)-crash on bullpats:paronomastic tauromachian anastomosis] and the symbols, analogous in their heavy timbre, in the value of their discontinuity, to the brass and percussion. What sings, what flows smoothly, what moves by accidentals, arabesques, and controlled ritardandos through an intelligible progression (like the melody often given the woodwinds) is the series of enigmas, their suspended disclosure, their delayed resolution: the development of an enigma is really like that of a fugue; both contain a *subject*, subjected to an *exposition*, a *development* . . .

—for verily the classic text is "a *tonal* text . . . and its tonal unity is basically dependent on two sequential codes: the revelation of truth and the coordination of the actions represented: there is the same constraint in the gradual order of melody and in the equally gradual order of the narrative sequence. *Now, it is precisely this constraint which reduces the plural of the classic text.*" Take a deep breath after that barrage of italics (at the climax of the Italian aria) and then get this: "The classic text . . . is a multivalent but incompletely reversible system. What blocks its reversibility is just what limits the plural nature of the classic text. These blocks have names: on the one hand, truth; on the other, empiricism: against—or between—them, the modern text comes into being."

Atonal music has more notes than Mozart; untruthful and anti-empiric, numerical and infinite, Robbe-Grillet or Sollers (who wrote a book called *Nombres*) or Sarraute or Butor has more meanings, which all of a sudden turn into more *voices* (which may mean no meaning and no voices), than Saint-Simon or Flaubert:

> Who is speaking? . . . The more indeterminate the origin of the statement, the more plural the text. In modern texts, the voices are so treated that any reference is impossible: the discourse, or better, the language, speaks [Heidegger: "Language speaks, not man"; but Barthes doesn't have to quote or acknowledge because they're all of one

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> mind]: nothing more. By contrast, in the classic text the majority of the utterances are assigned an origin, we can identify their parentage, who is speaking . . .

—and this identification is klutzy and uncool because voices or no voices or discourse or language is better than persons because persons or centers of consciousness or presences don't exist or at least not on paper as the classic text pretends they do or at least have no authority in the new Nietzschean world of free play and infinite possibility, where we can discard such delusions of "bourgeois ideology" as "reality" and "life" (" 'Life' then, in the classic text, becomes a nauseating mixture of common opinions, a smothering layer of received ideas . . . the army of stereotypes"), where Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet[6] are better (more plural, more meaningful, less meaning-full) writers than Dickens and Tolstoy, where Purcell and Schubert have to step aside for Milton Babbitt.

In 1966 a symposium entitled "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation, was held at Johns Hopkins. "Over one hundred humanists and social scientists from the United States and eight other countries gathered. . . . The symposium inaugurated a two-year program of seminars and colloquia which sought to explore the impact of contemporary 'structuralist' thought on critical methods in humanistic and social studies"; and "the papers and discussions collected in . . . [*The Structuralist Controversy*] constitute . . . [its] proceedings." Biogenous international lightning had struck the primal ooze of American literary scholarship. Barthes was there, and his paper is all in the title: "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" In the discussion we learn without amazement that he has "a very high opinion of *La Jalousie*"; and Paul de Man wonders why Barthes's literary criticism is feeble and his literary history false:

> I have been somewhat disappointed by the specific analyses that you give us. . . . But more seriously, when I hear you refer to facts of literary history, you say things that are false within a typically French myth. I find in your work a false conception of classicism and romanticism. When, for example, concerning the question of the narrator or the "double ego," you speak of writing since Mallarmé and of the new novel, etc., and you oppose them to what happens in the romantic novel or story or autobiography—you are simply wrong. In the romantic autobiography, or, well before that, in the seventeenth-century story, this same complication of the ego (*moi*) is found, not only unconsciously, but explicitly and thematically treated, in a much more complex way than in the contemporary novel . . .

—to which Barthes's rejoinder is a lofty and mythical snarl:

[6] "What I found of some, but not inexhaustible, interest in the avant-garde of a few years ago was the exploitation of minutiae of sensibility in a man alone and immobile." "Stravinsky at Eighty-Five: An Interview," *The New York Review of Books*, VIII, No. 10 (June 1, 1967), p. 15.

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> It is difficult to reply because you question my own relationship to what I say [i.e. you've got the gall to tell me I'm wrong]. But I will say, very recklessly and risking redoubled blows on your part, that I never succeed [however little I try] in defining literary history independently of what time has added to it. In other words, I always give it a mythical dimension. For me, Romanticism includes everything that has been said about Romanticism [including what I've just said about Romanticism, which makes what I've said about Romanticism unassailable]. . . .

Jacques Lacan, founder of l'École Freudienne de Paris, delivers a remarkably idiosyncratic lecture that aspires to combine metaphysics, mathematics, and psychoanalysis ("Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever"): "in a universe of discourse nothing contains everything, and here you find again the gap that constitutes the subject. . . . The question of desire is that the fading subject yearns to find itself again by means of some sort of encounter with this miraculous thing defined by the phantasm . . . what in French we call the *sujet de la jouissance*"; and Angus Fletcher is exasperated:

> Freud was really a very simple man. . . . He didn't try to float on the surface of words. What you're doing is like a spider: you're making a very delicate web without any human reality in it. For example, you were speaking of joy [*joie, jouissance*]. In French one of the meanings of *jouir* is the orgasm . . . why not say so? All the talk I have heard here is so abstract! . . .

Jacques Derrida reads a touching and anguished and quite irrefutable paper on the impossibility of arguing the very case they are all there to argue:

> We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is alien to . . . [the history of metaphysics]; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. To pick out one example from many: the metaphysics of presence is attacked with the help of the concept of the *sign*. But from the moment anyone wishes this to show, as I suggested a moment ago, that there is no transcendental or privileged signified and that the domain or the interplay of signification has, henceforth, no limit, he ought to extend his refusal to the concept and to the word *sign* itself—which is precisely what cannot be done. For the signification "sign" has always been comprehended and determined, in its sense, as sign-of, signifier referring to a signified, signifier different from its signified. If one erases the radical difference between signifier and signified, it is the word *signifier* itself which ought to be abandoned as a metaphysical concept. When Lévi-Strauss says . . . that he has "sought to transcend the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible by placing [himself] from the very beginning at the level of signs," the necessity, the force, and the legitimacy of his act cannot make us forget that the concept of the sign

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> cannot in itself surpass or bypass this opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. The concept of the sign is determined by this opposition. . . .

Following Derrida's *cri de coeur*, the lead-footed sociological critic Lucien Goldmann (who says that in the seventeenth—and presumably every other—century "the *society* decided which were the valid solutions" for writers of the time) makes a joke to the effect that Derrida is not only royalist but Merovingian in the extremity of his propositions and poor Derrida's feelings are hurt "because it defines me as an ultra-royalist . . . whereas I have a much more humble, modest, and classical conception of what I am doing." Everywhere else in the world and here too, the metaphysics of presence prevails over the concept of the sign: there's nobody here but us chickens: Derrida's anxious and melancholy presence is even more irrefutable than his argument against that apocalyptic annihilation of presence which he otherwise insists ought and is just about to happen; Lacan is doubtless an unemployed wizard down on his luck, having inmixed a few too many othernesses between the fading gaps of desire; Goldmann eats butterflies for breakfast; and Barthes is a redoubled and intransitive jerk.

Only two of the papers in *The Structuralist Controversy* are intentionally anti-structuralist: Neville Dyson-Hudson's and Georges Poulet's. Dyson-Hudson, an anthropologist, raises pointed questions about Lévi-Strauss as an anthropologist rather than as a culture-hero, and manages incidentally to brush off "the expected inanities" of those public nuisances the weekly reviewers: George Steiner's peristaltic name-dropping, which derives Lévi-Strauss from Broch, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rilke, Valéry, Sartre, Camus, Hegel, the Cambridge Platonists, Montaigne, Gide, Leibniz, Vico, Jung, Marx, Bacon, Bruno, La Bruyère, and others; "the faintly hysteric ignorance" of Susan Sontag, complaining that "Anthropology has always struggled with an intense, fascinated repulsion towards its subject" and discovering its savior in none other than the one-and-only, "the man who has created anthropology as a total occupation." As for the blessed Poulet (just one of us chickens), he is an old-fashioned literary critic who does a nostalgic piece in defense of presence and consciousness:

> . . . whenever I take up a book, and begin to read it . . . I am aware of a rational being, of a consciousness; the consciousness of another, no different from the one I automatically assume in every human being I encounter, except that in this case the consciousness is open to me, welcomes me, lets me look deep inside itself, and even allows me, with unheard-of license, to think what it thinks and feel what it feels . . .

—and answering Goldmann, who has asked how the sympathetic and unscientific Poulet would be able to judge a statement by one of his *bad* students: "What would Poulet do with a bad student of Poulet? . . . I would try to identify with my bad student, and I would not be able to do it." Barthes's ears must have been tingling at that electric moment.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Our Man in Life

TWENTY-THREE YEARS AGO THIS PAST FALL I began graduate work for my doctorate in English; not long after that my attention was called (not of course by a professor, but by a fellow student-sufferer) to a piece published that fall in this magazine. Titled "Conrad and the Terms of Modern Criticism," written by Marvin Mudrick, it asserted that contemporary critics of fiction had gone gaga over myth and symbol by promoting the notion that a novel was a "disingenuous treasure of hints and clues, shrewdly buried by the author beneath the misleading or innocuous surface, to be as shrewdly dug up and displayed by the critic in proof of his own matching adeptness." Conrad was a particularly good case in point, as Mudrick showed by considering two enthusiastic bits of adeptness from Albert Guerard and R. W. Stallmann directed at "The Secret Sharer." To contradict their elaborate claims for the story's rich ambiguities of meaning, Mudrick quoted phrase after phrase from it in order to demonstrate "Conrad's oversimplified, imposed mythical structure, symbol to character in the crudest one-to-one relationship; nailed into the flesh of the narrative in almost every sentence." After making some admiring gestures in the direction of *Typhoon* and *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* which, by comparison, "mind their business" and eschew symbolology, Mudrick suggested that "Conrad might have done better . . . if he had been describable by his critical partisans not as a poet in fiction, but as a man who merely tells a tale."

I found and still find this exhilarating stuff, but hope I was unsettled enough by it to wonder at least for a moment just what business it was the novelist had better mind. On the basis of Mudrick's writing over the next twenty-three years, particularly this collection from the last seven or so of them, the business turns out to be nothing less than life.[1] In explanation of the new book's odd title, Mudrick finds it ironically apt that Poe, who preferred machines to people and liked to make "mechanical monsters in verse and prose," should have fascinated the French poets who reintroduced him to our literature as a modernist: "They couldn't have guessed that in English, try as he might to scare the hell out of us, he was very funny." Mudrick suggests that had Poe but known how funny he was he might have become the W. C. Fields of literature; although he didn't do that, nevertheless

> Poe lives. Absurd and excessive, a bigger mystery than any of the books which contain him, American rankness with a little French dressing, he had the effrontery to palm off on us the silliest, least interesting, and most influential of twentieth-century critical dogmas; that books are machines with nobody inside.

[1] THE MAN IN THE MACHINE, by *Marvin Mudrick*. Horizon Press. $9.95.

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So, like the Conrad essay from back then, these recent ones may be understood as attempts (invariably successful ones in my judgment) to discover the life, the man, the somebody inside the book which so much boring criticism or noncriticism is even now telling us we shouldn't or mustn't or can't (see The Hermeneuticals wrestling with The Text, and winning) pay attention to.

In the words of the opening piece in this collection, the novelist's business is "Looking for Kellermann." Kellermann, encountered in one of Kafka's diary entries, is a disastrously bad writer who wants to read his stories aloud to an audience that, understandably enough, walks out on him: "I should still like very much to read a little tale that will take only fifteen minutes. I will pause for five minutes." Mudrick loves this passage, enough to use it as exemplary of what he's concerned with; for Kellermann—like the chief clerk in *Metamorphosis*, appalled at what's happened to Gregor Samsa—"cannot be said to 'stand for' anything else since they never cease to be only themselves, they are too dense to dissipate themselves." This index of value reminds me of Wyndham Lewis' comment about the sufficiency-unto-itself of *Ulysses* ("No one who looks *at* it will ever want to look *behind* it") and of Eliot's praising the "life" in the solid superficies of a Ben Jonson play.

"Pure and intense instances of life in print" is Mudrick's bold, and bald, way of saying what he's looking for. If such a quest seems impossible, unlikely, too vague for respectability, still there's no help for it

> since everything else is already laid out in Northrop Frye's elegant Linnaean categories, or Wayne Booth's conventional morality disguised as an inventory of handy devices, or Ian Watt's sociology, or Albert Guerard's Jungian recipes, or R. S. Crane's infatuation with thoroughly lubricated plots, or F. R. Leavis's rack-and-thumbscrew culture-obsession.

Leavis is there not because he wrote *Revaluation* but because, with his wife, he wrote a book on Dickens which Mudrick thoroughly dislikes (quite rightly to my mind, although the parts by Q. D. Leavis are better criticism than her husband's). Leavis' "culture-obsession" in this book is such that he keeps making Dickens' characters "stand for" something or other rather than letting them be what they are and not another thing. Though Mudrick doesn't say it, this tendency makes for dull writing (as anyone who has tried to read through Leavis' analyses of *Little Dorrit* or *Dombey and Son* might agree) and Mudrick's own writing is never dull. Something happens on every page or paragraph to jolt the reader into questioning an old valuation, agreeing or disagreeing with a new one. He is the least abstract critic one could imagine.

The above list of professors seems to me extremely amusing and satisfying, though "unfair" the way any satire is. As for its manners, surely this is not how someone in The Profession talks about his distinguished colleagues; so I would guess that Mudrick is not in heavy demand to chair symposia on Modernism at the MLA or English Institute. Anyway he's

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not interested in Modernism, but life—as it suddenly reveals itself in Kafka or Trollope or Lawrence or Chaucer. His essay on Samuel Johnson, the best piece of writing in this collection, was originally titled "The Ogre at the Feast of Life"; and Mudrick has himself liked on occasion to play the ogre ready to feast on life wherever he finds it and no mind if a few comely professors get chewed up in the process. In this book he plays the ogre mainly in relation to contemporary academic critics whose procedures he finds distasteful. The Leavises (hardly "academic critics," but never mind) are referred to at one point as "the Murdstones of Lit. Crit." which may seem at first a strictly gratuitous and insulting wisecrack. But if you look at the context you see that the Leavises in their Dickens book have referred to "the Holloways of Eng. Lit" to which Mudrick adds the following parenthesis: "(John Holloway, who unlike the Leavises—the Murdstones of Lit. Crit.—is not plural, had ventured to publish an essay in respectful disagreement with Leavis' on *Hard Times*)." The parenthetical corrective (Mudrick thrives on parentheses) seems richly deserved and is brilliantly executed—if the Leavises weren't the Leavises they would be amused despite themselves.

Then there is Richard Ellmann whom Mudrick goes after with real ferocity in a review of *Golden Codgers*, a collection of Ellmann's essays of a few years back. Mudrick terms him "dean of the squirmy biographers" (Lytton Strachey is a forebear) who aim to demonstrate "that every writer's private life is as unseemly as ours; that nobody is any better than he has to be." Other squirmy biographers are Carlos Baker, Lawrance Thompson, and Arthur Mizener who gets treated like this:

> On page 192 of *The Saddest Story*, having surveyed the latest of Ford's accumulating personal troubles, Mizener remarks that "Ford was, as usual, broke." Ford was then thirty-five. He had already achieved a well-deserved position among the best-known men of letters of the age; he had written eleven novels; he had been Joseph Conrad's collaborator and friend; he had edited the best English literary review ever; he had been the discoverer, sponsor, and associate of the best of "*les jeunes*" (e.g. Pound, Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis); in his spare time he had had a nervous breakdown while leading an extremely complicated social and private life; he didn't gamble or make foolish investments; he worked very hard and hoped his books would sell and argued with publishers for better contracts; he was an excellent cook; but the tenured Ivy League professor, pausing for an occasional chat with his tax lawyer to maximize his profit from books about impecunious artists, is inexorable. Mozart was, as usual, broke.

Great to read aloud, splendid defense of Ford—but how "squirmy" is Arthur Mizener anyway? I think *The Saddest Story* should be considered a labor of love, not profit—a book Mizener must have spent many years on (and which was remaindered almost immediately) that is surely admiring of its subject. Mudrick's performance is so invigorating (especially the

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really *inspired* sentence about Mozart) that in the process an individual gets stepped on, pressed wrongly into a mold.

Unlike Mizener, whose manner is sober and quiet, Ellmann is a much more justifiable target since he can never resist the temptation to play with words, making jokes often at his subject's expense in what Mudrick terms "innumerable quick strokes of condescension and callous flippancy"—although even with some rather damaging sentences quoted by Mudrick, there is much in the Joyce biography that escapes such criticism altogether. Mudrick illustrates what he means by quoting from *Golden Codgers*:

> But Ellmann isn't content just to talk mean; now that censorship has collapsed he wants to talk both mean and dirty; such is the burden of *Golden Codgers*, and, fifteen years after *Joyce*, Ellmann shambles out for his last tango with the sniggering academic reader: "During seven years Gide and Wilde had five spurts of acquaintance," he commences the second paragraph of his essay on the Gide-Wilde relationship. On Pater the patron of sensuousness and Ruskin the puritan: "One was all infection and the other all contraception." On the prevalence of excremental images in Luther: "Psychohistorians will have to take account . . . of the possible banality of anality in Luther's time." On the phrase "boyish holiday" in Wilde's "*Helas!*": A "boyish holiday" is . . . not the most offensive way to spend one's time, especially if one likes boys (Pederasty is Ellmann's most hilarious topic).

This is tough, but funny and fair too, except for the (obligatory?) swipe at the "academic" reader sniggering away. (Remember that one of Mizener's sins seems to have been that not only was he "tenured," like Mudrick, but also—horrors—an Ivy Leaguer!) To cease this demonstration of how much fun Mudrick-as-ogre can be, I shall only allude to the Lawrence essay in which his biographer, Professor Moore ("Vincent van Moore, Harry T. Carp"), everybody's whipping boy and for good reasons, receives this tribute: "If the prince turned into a frog and nobody told him, he would have something like Moore's majestic presumptuousness."

Mudrick dislikes systematic approaches to literature because they operate on and at the expense of the life in a book; he dislikes biographers, particularly academic ones, who write elegant sentences at the expense of their subject's life ("Though not so blind as Homer, nor so exiled as Dante, he had reached his life's nadir"—Ellmann on Joyce); he has a contempt for Research when it is exercised by, say, Norman Sherry who reads 200 books about South America so he could be authoritative on the sources, of *Nostromo* ("multiply 200 by a dozen, and divide by two detached retinas" suggests Mudrick, helpfully). What does he like? I can imagine somebody snarling; and I am tempted to answer, he likes to read. Likes Saint-Simon on The Marquis de Reffuge who "was highly respectable, and sober, but vastly absent-minded. His valets sometimes took advantage of that fact to bring him at one time seven or eight glasses of wine, none of which he had ordered, and he would swallow all of them without thinking.

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Thus he was frequently drunk, and when he came to his senses could never imagine how it happened." Likes Chekhov, Trollope, Jane Austen, Dr. Johnson, and Lawrence who, in the most outrageous sentence of the book he calls "so far the only writer of the century" ("writer" as contrasted with novelist, poet, tale-teller, man of letters—but what then, pray is Wyndham Lewis on whom Mudrick once wrote a good essay?). Likes writers (Tolstoy, Lawrence) who insist on testing literature by life and for whom, thus, literature eventually fails.

Since unlike Tolstoy or Lawrence, Mudrick isn't a novelist of genius (though I think I remember reading a story of his once) nor a religious or political or critical prophet (like George Steiner), literature can't "fail" him in big exciting ways. His ironic sense of the vanities, even dangers of taking fiction as something other or more than fiction, means that he knows how much it must truly be valued. Although the appreciative essays here don't have much shape, move from one interesting quotation to another, dive back now and then to consider the book *on* Trollope or Lawrence which originally occasioned the essay, he always ends strong, his best (or at least nicest) self shining out in his encomiums. Looking for Kellermann is an act of companionableness; and Mudrick's least ambiguous sentence is about Johnson in these terms: "He was a great, good, kind, loving, companionable man." About Trollope he warns us, "There's just too much of Trollope, it's all bang in the open with no tricks, and if we don't watch out he'll be getting on our precious nerves"; or he calls him a "passionate man" (surely nobody ever said that before) devoted to keeping things under control but having "a great deal to control." Thus "Some of the fun of reading him is in looking for moods that don't fit, feelings that get rather out of hand, surprises." Just like life.

What you finally come away from Mudrick wanting to do is read or reread the books he talks about (I have done *Persuasion* and am occupied with *Barchester Towers*); and anybody who thinks this experience is a common one hasn't read much literary criticism recently. In his essay on Jane Austen, ending with a tribute to Anne Elliott which will serve also as my ending, there is a wonderful clearing of the decks when Mudrick deals with Charlotte Brontë's famous criticism of Austen's deficiencies in feeling. Says Mudrick, "Jane Austen lacks it no doubt ('the Passions are perfectly unknown to her'); but not every nineteenth-century English novelist or her sister is deficient in men on horseback, nubile governesses, depressing scenery, locks and bolts, occasional moderate to heavy rain, gigantic tantrums, *rigor mortis* (bite-me-to-death-I-love-it) *à la* Heathcliff." Eventually he imagines what might have happened if Charlotte Brontë had made the remark in 1813 and Jane Austen had heard it—she would have forthwith decided to satisfy her with the heroine of *Persuasion* ("I'd better invent a heroine who is warm enough for absolutely everybody—I'll invent Anne Elliott"). And he closes his essay with these lovely sentences:

> Richardson could do the great incendiary talker, Clarissa; but it took Jane Austen, in her last novel, to do Anne Elliott, the great quiet incendiary, the unregarded lady in the drawingroom, who till she has

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all the reason in the world leaves the talking to others, questions no arrangements while noticing them all, never imposes, always assists, and keeps her heart and soul available for anybody—Captain Wentworth or the Crofts or the author or the reader—who might at some time or another have the good luck to accompany her on her unnoticed morning walk along the streets of Bath.

With companionableness such as this, Mudrick convinced me to come along.

Notes on Contributors

LAURENCE LIEBERMAN's collection of essays, *Unassigned Frequencies: American Poetry in Review (1964–77)*, was published in November by the University of Illinois Press. His most recent volume of poetry was *The Osprey Suicides* from Macmillan.

This spring CHARLES TOMLINSON's *Selected Poems* and *The Shaft* will be published by Oxford University Press. His memoir, "Some American Poets: A Personal Record" appeared in *Contemporary Literature* for Summer 1977.

Recent publications by HOWARD MOSS include a book of poems, *Buried City*, a book of light verse, *A Swim Off the Rocks*, and a children's book, *Tigers and Other Lilies*. Mr. Moss is currently working on a collection of critical essays and a new book of poems.

JOYCE CAROL OATES's newest volume of stories, *Night-Side* from Vanguard Press, includes "The Widows," a story originally published in this Review. She will be Writer-in-Residence at Princeton University in 1978–79.

JOHN FANDEL teaches at Manhattan College in the Bronx. His new book of poems *Bach and a Catbird*, will be published by Roth.

The author of seven books of poetry, SAMUEL HAZO is the Director of the International Poetry Forum in Pittsburgh. His first novel, *The Very Fall of the Sun*, was published in *The Hudson Review* last year.

The most recent novel by JOHN GARDNER is *October Light* from Knopf.

ROGER SALE is finishing a book about children's literature and is teaching at the University of Washington.

GERALD WEALES, who teaches drama at the University of Pennsylvania, is the author of *Clifford Odets, Playwright* and *Religion in Modern English Drama*. He reviews theater for *Commonweal*.

GILBERTO PEREZ teaches the history and theory of film, its criticism, "appreciation," and practice, in the Visual Arts Program at Princeton University.

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GERALD WEALES

From Pole to Pole

"Just see what jesters Poland produces;
they can amuse you to the death!"
—Count Fantazy

On a single day last Spring, an enterprising theatergoer could have seen Tadeusz Różewicz's *White Marriage* at a matinee in New Haven and made it to New York in time to catch the off-off-Broadway production of Sławomir Mrożek's *Émigrés*. Twenty years ago, he could not have found a Polish play in the American theater with a search party. In the early 1960's Mrożek's one-act plays began to turn up on off-Broadway bills, but it was not until the 1970's that his work was performed with some regularity not only in New York but in the regional theaters. At the same time, the plays of Witkacy (Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz) were first seen in New York, and Jerzy Grotowski, whose Laboratory Theatre visited the United States in 1969, became an important influence on experimental companies in this country. The works of Mrożek, Różewicz, Witkiewicz and Witold Gombrowicz are increasingly available in American paperbacks. Even so, the Polish writers are not quite household names—even playhousehold names—evoking instant responses as Beckett and Brecht do.

The slow and tentative impinging of the Polish presence on American theater had its counterpart in Poland where the avant-garde, which had always been a peripheral activity ("lonely, private, prophetic," to use Daniel Gerould's phrase), emerged in the 1950's, after the death of Stalin, as the central, virtually the only theatrical voice in Poland. *Twentieth-Century Polish Avant-Garde Drama*[1] is an account of that emergence told through Gerould's introduction and a collection of plays, scenarios and theoretical essays. Gerould differentiates—perhaps a bit too neatly—between the Western avant-garde, in which one fashionable aesthetic rebellion followed on the heels of another, and the Polish avant-garde in which the practitioners, usually poets and painters, invented a "displaced drama" without a theater to house it. Working in isolation, they were underground voices that would not be heard until the flowering in the 1950's. "But after all, an artist's worth comes from either rebellion or success," says Pope Julius II in Witkacy's *The Cuttlefish;* Gerould's book is the story of how the Polish avant-garde managed finally to be both at the same time.

Although Gerould discusses some of the antecedents of the post-World War I avant-garde, his collection begins with Witkacy, who is represented by *The Anonymous Work* (1921), subtitled "Four Acts of a Rather Nasty Nightmare," and one of his essays on "the Theatre of Pure Form." In

[1] TWENTIETH-CENTURY POLISH AVANT-GARDE DRAMA: Plays, Scenarios, Critical Documents, ed. by *Daniel Gerould*. Cornell University Press. $15.00.

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other collections in which Witkiewicz plays appear—the Bantam *Avant-Garde Drama,* which Gerould edited with Bernard F. Dukore, and Dukore's revision of John Gassner's *A Treasury of the Theatre*—the playwright is identified as a surrealist, presumably because of the anti-realistic surface of his plays and the occasional direct evocation of dreams (Tadzio in *The Water Hen* spends much of the play wondering why he doesn't wake up). The surrealist label disappears in the new collection, as it should since Witkacy, despite his interest in Western artists like Picasso and Stravinsky, had little patience with most avant-garde movements—*purblaguism,* as he called them in *The Cuttlefish* and in a pamphlet parodying the new styles. My difficulty with Witkacy, in the abstract at least, is that his "Theatre of Pure Form" remains amorphous to me, as much a metaphysical as an aesthetic concept, one that I can perceive only in its separate elements not as the unity he intends. His plays are a reaction against conventional plotting and psychological presentation of character, as what avant-garde theater is not, but I have no trouble following his plots or recognizing his characters; chance plays a large part in the former ("What a series of coincidences!" says Tzingar in *The Anonymous Work*), conventional typing in the latter. I can see his genteel grotesquerie as a "fantasticality of psychology and actions," as he says in the introduction to *Tumor Brainard*—a deformation from within, a transference of content from real-life reference to formal element—but without the outrageousness that once seemed to mark his plays. *The Anonymous Work* is simply a comedy about a revolution within a revolution and the plight of the artist in a society in which the individual cannot exist—perennial Witkacy themes—wrapped in a parody plot and presented in a setting in which color, line, spatial placement, as the stage directions show, join the verbal element to make the precise desired effect. But Pure Form?

However conventional Witkacy's work seems today, few of his plays were performed when they were written (1918–1939); many of them, unpublished, simply disappeared. In the early 1940's, an amateur production of his *The Madman and the Nun,* which never got beyond rehearsals, brought together a group of students who founded an underground literary magazine through which avant-garde aesthetics became anti-Nazi protest; all of them died at the hands of the Germans. Gerould includes Andrzej Trzebiński's *To Pick up the Rose* as an example of this group. It is a remarkable play to have been written by a twenty-one-year old Pole in 1942, dispassionate and ironic in a time that called for emotional allegiances; but, then, Trzebiński and his friends were nihilists with the courage to die for a future they scarcely believed in—living/dying examples of the kind of paradox that preoccupied Camus. Like *The Anonymous Work*, *Rose* is a play about revolution, the pointless transference of power, with a central image—a Ping-Pong game played without a ball—that has both thematic and dramatic substance. The play may be overextended, but that is hardly a fault of Trzebiński's youth. He shares a tendency to worry a scene, a conversation, an image until it is drained of surprise and force with the rest of the Polish avant-garde from Witkacy (*v.* *The Cuttlefish*) to Mrożek (*v.* the Ala-Arthur conversation in Act II of

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Tango), who in turn share the charactertistic with much of the Western avant-garde (*v.* Arrabal, Dürrenmatt, Robert Wilson).

To represent the immediate post-war years, Gerould has chosen Konstantly Ildefons Głaczyński, who is no playwright at all. His Little Theatre of *The Green Goose* existed only in his head and in the pages of a Cracow literary weekly. Like archy the vers libre cockroach, whom Don Marquis gave to the readers of the New York *Sun, The Green Goose* was at once sophisticated and very popular. The plays (Gerould gives twenty-two samples) resemble the Ring Lardener minidramas like *Clemo Uti*, although Głaczyński's nonsense, less open that Lardner's, is shaped to make a satiric point. Or a political one, presumably, since in the early 1950's Głaczyński was forced to bring his erratic curtain down for the last time.

As an example of the post-Stalin emergence of the avant-garde, Gerould introduces the reader to Jerzy Afanasjew, his Bim-Bom Troupe (1953–1960) and his Afanasjeff Family Circus (1958–1962), who used visual images, mime and the skills of the circus and the street fairs to create theatrical events from scenarios which were usually devised by the group. Quickly popular, they were given official recognition and support and, although the groups eventually disbanded, they represent that moment in which, as Gerould indicates, the avant-garde became the mainstream. The sample scenarios in the Gerould volume are no more than indicators, since the substance of this kind of theater lies in the presentation, but it is possible to see that from the beginning their work represented an odd mixture of satire ("Snouts") and sentimentality ("Faust"). The clown who can say "The world is not such a bad place, as long as apple trees blossom"—a sentiment which appeals to the Pollyanna in me—is working on the intellectual level of "It takes a heap o' livin' in a house t' make it home," which may explain both the popularity and the official blessing.

Mrożek and Różewicz, the two most important of the contemporary playwrights, are represented by unusual choices—Mrożek by his first play, a nine-minute sketch he wrote for the Bim-Bom Troupe, and Różewicz by an essay which is at once the scenario for a theater work and an explanation of why it cannot be written. The latter gives Gerould a chance to suggest that, the avant-garde having become establishment, a new experimentalism is being created, but reading Różewicz's document that way erases the line Gerould drew at the beginning of his introduction, separating the Polish from the Western avant-garde.

In tracing the literary heritage of Witkacy and company, Gerould goes back to the nineteenth century, to Adam Mickiewicz, Zygmunt Krasiński and Juliusz Słowacki, and Harold B. Segel, in his introduction to *Polish Romantic Drama*[2] sees the theatrical reclamation of these plays—closet dramas coming out of the closet—as "the foundation on which the modern Polish theatre, especially the theatre of the avant-garde, has been built." The Segel volume, then, makes an interesting companion to Gerould's collection.

Although Polish Romanticism is said to have begun with the pub-

[2] POLISH ROMANTIC DRAMA: Three Plays in English Translation, ed. by *Harold B. Segel*. Cornell University Press. $17.50.

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lication of Mickiewicz's first volume of poetry in 1822, it is identified with the Polish émigré society which formed in Paris after the unsuccessful November Insurrection against Russia in 1830. Writing in exile, the Polish poets had even less access to theaters than their Western counterparts whose separation from their national theaters was aesthetic rather than geographical. It was not until the turn of the century that imaginative directors in Poland began to try to find ways of giving stage life to works confined to the page in their own time. Understandably, despite his interest in the stage possibilities of these plays, Segel gives most of his introduction to the cultural and political context within which the plays were written and to the ideational assumptions of the individual dramatists, their commitment to or discontent with the Romantic ideas and conventions out of which their plays were born.

Virtually unknown to American theatergoers, the Polish Romanticists have had much of their work published in English, usually by specialized presses. It is clear from Segel's Preface that he hopes to reach a more general audience, one primed for Polish theater by the availability of the contemporary dramatists. For that audience, it is perhaps enough to present readable translations of representative plays, but what the present volume cannot do is make clear that Mickiewicz and Słowacki are, as Segel says, Poland's two greatest poets, and *Forefathers' Eve, Part III* a major dramatic poem. What Segel does is give the reader versions of three nineteenth-century Polish plays which presumably have theatrical validity that reaches beyond the time and language in which they were written.

Forefathers' Eve, Part III (1832), Mickiewicz's apologia for his absence during the November Insurrection and his bid for the role of poet-seer to the Polish nation, is the least accessible of the plays, too dependent for full understanding on the poet's biography, on the earlier parts of *Forefathers' Eve* (1823) to which it is vaguely connected, and on "Digression," the set of poems on the poet's Russian exile originally published with the play but not included here. The historical setting of the play is the arrest in 1824 of a group of young Lithuanian intellectuals (Mickiewicz among them) for alleged plots against the Russian throne, but its spiritual setting is a battle between angelic and demonic powers for "our gloomy poet Konrad." A typical Romantic figure, as his long speech in Scene ii indicates, he is willing to challenge God's power as creator, to set his heart against God's mind, but in the end, presumably saved by his respect for the Virgin Mary, his love of country, the support of the pious (Father Peter) and the pure (Eva), he is seen, a rough beast racing toward St. Petersburg to be born. There are some effective dramatic scenes (Father Peter's duel with the diabolic spirit in ii; the villainous Senator's party in viii), but the play, too obviously the creature of Mickiewicz's personal and poetic needs, seems in English more fustian than fine.

For Krasiński, convinced that the Polish gentry (his people) are doomed, Romanticism is at once cause and defense. Count Henry, the hero of *The Un-Divine Comedy* (1833), deserts his wife following a will-of-the-wisp spirit (poetry), who turns into the death's-head figure the wife has already seen (the transformation, a verbal description, might be

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effective on film). Having driven his wife to madness and death (there is impressive pre-*Peer Gynt* thematic use of mad voices) and having fathered a blind child completely disconnected from the real world, Henry goes public suddenly, as the play makes an abrupt shift in subject matter, to fight a losing battle against the forces of revolution. "You are composing a drama," says a voice from the air, echoing an earlier use of the same line, underlining the literariness, the ineffectuality of Henry's pose. Yet, he manages to be both the Romantic villain-hero and an ironic comment on that character, a double vision that is emphasized through Pancras, the revolutionary leader. Segel sees the latter as "a cynic hungry for absolute power," but the recurrent image of the eagle as fame, used with both Henry and Pancras, suggests that they are mirror images of the same Romantic self, the only possible explanation (internally at least) for the incredible final conversion of the victorious Pancras. This equation of hero and villain and some fine theatrical scenes—particularly one in the revolutionary camp that suggests the street scenes in Büchner's *Danton's Death* or the carnival in Brecht's *Galileo*—might make *The Un-Divine Comedy* a candidate for production if the obvious anti-Semitism in the depiction of the revolutionaries did not make it an unlikely possibility for the American stage.

Fantazy, which was found untitled and unfinished after Słowacki's death in 1849, is a very funny play, a mockery of Romantic ideas. Count Fantazy ("let me . . . cast off from myself the Byronic veneer of a satan") and Countess Idalia ("She's the kind of person who needs wounds") provide an anthology of Romantic gestures, attitudes, rhetoric ("There's an exclamation mark after every word," says a servant, reading Fantazy's letter). Segel differentiates between these two obviously satirical characters and the more conventional comedy lovers, Diana and Jan, and the Russian major whose last-act suicide Segel sees as a "supreme act of redemption," an idea of "Christian self-sacrifice." I find this reading difficult to accept. "Oh, what a marvelous scene!" exclaims Idalia after Jan's suffering-lover exchange with Diana's sister, and although the remark may define Idalia, it reminds us that Jan and Diana are familiar comedy figures. As for the major's sacrificial death, it is undercut by its graveyard setting (Idalia has warned that they all may "be left to play a comedy in the graveyard"), by the long, often interrupted autobiographical death speech which explains his need for political atonement and by the pointlessness of the sacrifice (the death of the offstage grandfather has presumably removed the economic barrier between the lovers). Besides, it is difficult to forget that when Respekt goes in search of the posturing Fantazy in Act IV, calling out, "Our son-in-law is killing himself . . ." the Major adds, "And theatre, too!" Whether a production of *Fantazy* goes for the consistent note of parody I hear in the play or—more trickily—for the sincerity amid the satire that Segel finds in it, Słowacki's play is clearly the best theatrical bet in *Polish Romantic Drama.* Of the plays that Segel and Gerould have collected, it is the one I would most like to see on stage.

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GILBERTO PEREZ

Narrative Voices

TWO NEW NOVELS FROM ENGLAND, by leading practitioners of the mode known as "social realism," take a very different approach to the reality, social and otherwise, with which they deal. *Saville*[1] and *The Widower's Son*[2] both tell the story—a familiar one in English literature—of a working-class boy from a mining town who grows up to better things, and whom we follow over the years from his birth through the endeavors and disappointments of his rise in life. Yet a measure of the fundamental difference between the two novels is that *Saville* takes roughly twice the length of *The Widower's Son* to cover less than half the years in the life of the protagonist. We leave Colin Saville in his young manhood at the book's end, his future still open; we follow William Scorton, the widower's son, well into middle age, until the pattern of a whole life has been established. Both books are set in the recent English past—the period before, during and after the Second World War—but David Storey's conveys a sense of life in the process of living it, the immediacy and uncertainty of the present, whereas Alan Sillitoe's is more like a summing up, a retrospective overview, the forest one can't see for the trees until one has been through it and looks back. If both books are to be called "realistic," it would be for different reasons: for the attention *Saville* gives to concrete detail, the trees in the thick of the forest; for the way *The Widower's Son* makes us see the general shape of a man's life.

In the much briefer section of *The Widower's Son* dealing with the protagonist's childhood, Sillitoe sets up a metaphor which serves him throughout to tie together his story. It is the metaphor of life as battle, a man up against the world around him like a soldier facing an enemy. William Scorton's father is a retired army sergeant who, after his wife's death, raises his son to be a better version of himself, instilling in him from an early age the soldierly virtues which are also, for the father, the attributes of a man, to be applied not only in combat but in all areas of life. The boy is taught to regard a landscape as if an enemy were advancing through it:

> At ten he could recognise the ground called 'dead' on which, from a seeming vantage point, you could not see an enemy advancing. It was a dip of the land in which they were invisible and safe from your fire, and the name 'dead ground' was a sinister label for a place wherein all sorts of secret forces could assemble before destroying you, and after the unequal fight you ended up in that other piece of 'dead ground' called the cemetery.

[1] SAVILLE, by *David Storey*. Harper and Row. $10.00.
[2] THE WIDOWER'S SON, by *Alan Sillitoe*. Harper and Row. $8.95.

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To be prepared to meet that enemy a soldier must get the measure of the terrain he is in: "so William was taught how to judge distance and, what went with it, to *keep* his distance as well." The boy's future is planned for him by his father with all the deliberate strategy of a good commander in battle; nothing is to be left to chance, except that there is always that "dead ground" where an enemy may be hidden.

Everything works out according to plan in William's army career, his winning a scholarship to military college, becoming a master gunner and brave soldier against the Germans, returning to England a lieutenant colonel after the war. But the lieutenant colonel spots a tall and striking woman at a party, a brigadier's daughter it turns out, drops all his tactics and makes a straight line for her, directly falling in love, proceeding to marry her soon afterwards. Getting the measure of that woman, Georgina, proves harder than charting any actual battlefield; the master gunner fails to keep his distance in the uncharted field of love, where secret forces he was unprepared to meet, assembled in a dead ground deadlier than he knew, wind up nearly destroying him. Strictly a male view, some will complain I suppose, this military metaphor with the woman cast as the enemy; but I found it a welcome change to have the break-up of a marriage, a subject mainly women write about these days, presented from the man's side. Sillitoe handles the point of view very nicely, staying with William most of the time but telling us just a little bit more about Georgina than William would know, so as to give us a sense of that ground hidden from him without dispelling its mystery. The author's metaphor becomes the characters' in a brilliant passage, at once funny and grim, in which the master gunner and the brigadier's daughter, their marriage falling apart, send against each other imaginary armies whose maneuvers and bloody combat they describe to each other with relish. This imagined war to the death arouses them sexually and ends up with their making love; but in the real conflict between them William ends by cutting his wrist and Georgina leaves him to die. It is not only the marriage which is seen as combat, but William's whole life, his upbringing by his soldier father, his actual fighting in the war, his civilian job running an entertainment center with a retired colonel's military efficiency, his facing in the end, as he loses the last battle against Georgina, the secret forces within himself. Into himself is where he should have been in the first place, he muses, having gone through that encounter to find contentment in a teaching career and another marriage, a man of sixty now, looking back from the perspective of a settled life.

No metaphor could, for the author of *Saville,* adequately sum up a man's life, no recollection in tranquillity do justice to the lived reality of the moment so vividly evoked in this book. That *Saville* ends with the protagonist in mid-point is only in keeping with the procedure all along of putting us in the middle of a concrete situation without our being quite sure of its meaning, as if the fact that this happened, in this particular way, were more important than any generalization after the fact. The withholding of comment by the author is nothing unusual, of course, but here it carries unusual conviction as a genuine reticence before the par-

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ticularity of actual experience, a deep respect for the complexity of everyday life. David Storey must have drawn on his own background in a mining village in Yorkshire for his richly observed portrayal of that environment and the boy growing up in it, the place and the people described with the feeling of first-hand acquaintance. The different ways people talk are set down with the ear of a native—and with the talent for writing dialogue of the dramatist that David Storey also is. Yet, for all the closeness to lived experience we get in this novel, there is, throughout, a peculiar detachment, a silent questioning in the patient exploration of the surface of life.

Everywhere in this long book, almost from the beginning, we are with Colin Saville; "he" without an antecedent, following the description of a landscape, refers to Colin's presence there. It is through his presence that we have access to any situation; we are limited to his point of view. His boyhood friends in the village, for example, are children we get to know through their contact with him, and we pick them up later in their lives, find out what has become of them, only at those times when he encounters them. Yet in our access to Colin himself, the central character and limiting "central consciousness," we feel limited too. Even though he is present in every scene, the transition between scenes is often abrupt, an unbridged jump from one vividly presented moment to another, sometimes with a gap of years, as if Colin, like his friends, were someone we encounter intermittently, picking him up at a later point in his life without being quite sure what happened in between. Much as we share Colin's experience over the years, he remains rather opaque, held at a distance from us, someone we examine and can't fully identify ourselves with. We are let into his thoughts and feelings, his dreams even, but they are always described with Storey's characteristic reticence, set down like any other facts of life one mustn't rush to interpret:

> His mother was away for six weeks. In the end he decided she wasn't coming back and at night, in bed, he tried to invent a life for himself with Mrs. Shaw. One day he offered to clean her brasses and she sat by him at the table, anxiously watching each one, taking it from him when he had finished and polishing it a little harder herself. He dug Mr. Shaw's garden and planted some seeds, gazing over at his own garden, at the house now almost always silent, his father at the hospital nearly all the time. At school the other children told him his mother was dying and once an older boy told him she was dead, watching his expression, stooping down to look into his eyes.
>
> When, finally, they went to fetch his mother he felt frozen all over. It was as if everything had been numbed. He sat with his hands clenched on his knees, staring out of the bus window, past his father's shoulder. He couldn't remember what his mother looked like, or what kind of person she was.

Here we get the point of view of the child who doesn't know what has happened to his mother in the hospital, gone for such a long time that she

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seems to be dead; we don't find out until he does that she was gone to give birth to a baby brother. Yet we don't know exactly what to make of Colin: beyond the fact that he felt she was gone forever we are left to wonder what kind of deep impression this—and other absences of his mother from home—must have made on the young boy.

I detected in David Storey's book none of that simple-minded belief that the facts speak for themselves. On the contrary, his reluctance to draw conclusions is like a pressure put on the facts to have them yield a meaning they seem to want to hold back. The limited point of view, on Colin himself as on his environment, reflects here the author's awareness of the inevitable limitation in our access to experience, the resistance it offers to the meaning we strive to assign it. It has been suggested that the proper place for a novel to end is when we arrive at the meaning of life, the point indeed at which we leave the widower's son, but not Colin Saville. *Saville* ends with Colin's departure from his native village, a kind of resolution, to be sure, made possible by Colin's having worked out in some way the complicated pattern of his life up to that point, his entangled relationship with the family—above all that elusive mother—he can finally break away from. Yet this end is also a kind of question mark, appropriate in a book which all along has been an interrogation of the meaning of life. I found *The Widower's Son* the more enjoyable book for the conceit of its design—like a comedy, one could almost say, brought off in the face of near-tragedy. But *Saville* was the more moving in its prolonged striving, the author's as well as Colin's, to put together the pieces of a life.

The limited point of view of a character can be a tiresome device, especially when it is used ironically by an author who clearly knows better than the character we are limited to. The character we are stuck with in another new English novel, Beryl Bainbridge's *A Quiet Life,*[3] is a boring adolescent boy, a conformist to the absurdly genteel standards of his family, while the more interesting character, his rebellious younger sister, is off somewhere on the beach most of the time—the setting is a seaside village in post-war England—carrying on with a German prisoner she is in love with. The boy lives with his family in a small house—they had seen better days before the war—made more cramped by the neatness and order that must be kept, his mother endlessly arranging the furniture, the front room reserved for guests so that they all have to sit in the kitchen taking care not to trip over one another when they get up. Miss Bainbridge, who seems to be a specialist in confinement, further cramps us by giving us the boy's view of things. My feeling reading this book was that I wanted to get out of there, out of that house where the parents quarrel all the time, out of that boy's point of view. The sister, whose free spirit is evidenced by the fact that she is a sloppy eater, can get out, but I couldn't except by putting the book aside, which I would have done if I hadn't assumed the responsibility of a reviewer. This book might have been more interesting if it had been done in the first person, Faulkner-style, in the

[3] A QUIET LIFE, by *Beryl Bainbridge*. Braziller. $7.95.

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fumbling words of a repressed adolescent; as it is we get the author's knowing third-person prose.

Anne Tyler's *Earthly Possessions*[4] is written in the first person, the narrator a housewife of thirty-five who, having lived all her life in the same house in Clarion, Maryland, informs us in the first sentence of the book that she has decided to leave her husband. Just as she is about to get cash for the trip, she is kidnapped by a bank robber and taken as a hostage on the road. The story of the kidnapping gives way every other chapter to a flashback account, also given by her in the first person, of Charlotte Emory's past life. We have here another exercise in confinement: the house Charlotte hadn't been able to escape from, where she grew up with parents she disliked and where she stayed after she was married to a husband she also disliked, gives way to the car where she is stuck along dreary roads with a bank robber and the pregnant girlfriend he feels responsible for. But Miss Tyler's first person is indeed an improvement over Miss Bainbridge's third: rather than the author's amused condescension, much better to have the character's own assessment of her situation as a kind of outrageous joke. Miss Tyler does well a peculiarly feminine mode of self-belittling, sardonic humor, something like Carol Burnett's. "She reminded me of a withered balloon," says Charlotte of her mother dying of cancer, a woman who had been so fat she hardly ever went out of the house, whose "dresses were like enormous flowered undershirts," so fat she hadn't known she was pregnant until the unexpected birth of her only child. Her belief that her child had gotten mixed up with another at the hospital understandably made an impression on Charlotte:

> These were my two main worries when I was a child: one was that I was not their true daughter, and would be sent away. The other was that I *was* their true daughter and would never, ever manage to escape to the outside world.

The mother, who lives with Charlotte and her preacher husband in their crowded household, is now dying. Here is Charlotte's description of her getting the news:

> By suppertime she'd been clapped in the hospital; by eight the next morning she'd been operated on. I waited for word on a vinyl couch that stuck to the backs of my legs. When Dr. Porter and the surgeon walked toward me, I jumped up with a smacking sound. The surgeon arrived first and developed a sudden interest in a still life hanging behind me. "All we did," he said over his shoulder, "was close her up again." I didn't like his choice of words.

Here is how she tells her mother:

> "I need to know the name of my problem," she said.
> For a minute I didn't understand. Her problem? How would I know?

[4] EARTHLY POSSESSIONS, by *Anne Tyler*. Knopf. $7.95.

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I was still trying to figure out the name of *my* problem. But then she said, "My illness, Charlotte."

"It's cancer," I said.

It turns out, however, that her mother's dying affects Charlotte more than she had expected. In the most poignant episode in the book, she discovers among her mother's possessions a photograph of a young girl, takes this girl for the true daughter who should have been in Charlotte's place, and confronts the mother on her deathbed with the picture. This is convincing in itself, a turning point for Charlotte, but inconsistent with the sardonic stance she has maintained. The new understanding she gains of her mother ought to have modified the narrator's stance all along, for the account she gives of her past life is presumably the way she understands it now, looking back, knowing she would come, in the end, to feel empathy with that fat lady. I'm not sure Miss Tyler is aware that the alternating chapters of her novel, though all in the first person, are really in two different voices: the retrospective and the eyewitness first person, one may call them. We accept the convention, in an eyewitness account of ongoing events, that the narrator will come to find out things unexpected at the beginning, as indeed Charlotte does in her experience with the bank robber. But in a retrospective account, a summing up of past events from the perspective of the present, we feel cheated unless we get some sense all along that the narrator knows how things will turn out.

Peter Taylor employs the retrospective first person with complete assurance in the title story of his new collection, *In the Miro District*.[5] One summer, when the narrator was a boy of eighteen, a confrontation took place between him and his grandfather which the narrator, now in his late middle age, often thinks about. He tells us this right at the beginning, and gives us also a brief description of what the confrontation was over: we are prepared to delve into the past, aware of the discrepancy between what happened then and the man telling us about it now. The boy lived with his parents in Nashville, the Miro District, as the grandfather was fond of calling it, because he thought the name of the last Spanish governor of the region suited the city's pretensions to grandeur. Yet the grandfather, after the confrontation that summer, ends up living in Nashville with the boy's family and adopting the grandiose role of the reminiscing Confederate veteran he had always refused to be. It was really, the narrator tells us, his parents who were, through him, having it out with the grandfather, but we become aware as we read the narrator's account that he too has succumbed to his parents' pressure and rejected the values the grandfather had stood for. The author's irony is nicely handled here, but in another story in the same retrospective mode, told by a contented married man who over the years has had his real love life vicariously through a friend's romances, the irony at the expense of the narrator seems rather facile. The irony inherent in the retrospective first person, in the discrepancy between then and now characteristic of the form, can come too easily.

Four of the short stories in this collection are set out in lines of verse, not as poems but in a sort of verse prose I wasn't comfortable with. "I

[5] IN THE MIRO DISTRICT AND OTHER STORIES, by *Peter Taylor*. Knopf. $7.95.

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suppose it was ten seconds or so before I was enough myself/To own it was Emmagene's hand/She had cut off with the wood ax," the narrator of one of these stories tells us, a genteel Nashvillian discovering the self-mutilation of a country girl who had been staying with her relatives in the city. The verse format, compounding the condescending gentility of the narrator, seems inappropriate to the story of this unfortunate girl: another instance of author's irony gotten—if I may be excused a pun—out of hand. Elsewhere in this collection—particularly in the title story and in another, "The Captain's Son," I haven't the space to discuss—Peter Taylor remains the able writer of prose and master craftsman of the short story he has been for many years.

I greatly enjoyed a young writer's collection, *The Consul's File*[6] by the prolific Paul Theroux. The narrator of all these stories is the American Consul in a small town in Malaysia who recounts a diversity of experiences he had in his two years there. "The place, people said, was full of stories," but one of the first he heard, from a man who claimed to have been there when it happened, he later came upon in Somerset Maugham: "the stories were elusive, and I sometimes wondered what another writer would make of them." The man in a foreign country, witness to events he doesn't fully understand, recipient of information from natives or fellow-Westerners he isn't sure whether to trust, aware that this territory has been covered by other writers not always reliably: we have here the probing, self-conscious narrator dealing with the lives of others (only one story is really about himself) from the point of view of a stranger. As well as being about Malaysia, this book is about the different kinds of stories one can write about the place, the different ways one can write a story, a set of variations, brilliantly brought off, on the first-person account. The narrator, in one story, is the observer of an assortment of people gathered at a Christmas party; in another he starts out amused by a plump American girl with "fat legs and a bottom only a Chinese upholsterer could have admired," but then she is raped, he discovers, by an oily ghost; in another, a straight ghost story, he is the skeptical outsider traditional in the genre who finds that the local superstition about a horrific tree comes true; in another he is the detective solving a mystery; in another the politically conscious Consul who dislikes the Sultan and ponders, coming back from a visit to his mansion, on "those feebly lighted shacks" along the road, "and the cry of that child in the darkness, and the danger that all of us deserved."

The Consul begins as an outsider to the town's white community: "they were an odd crowd who treasured their oddity"; but after a while he speaks as one of their number: "we rather disliked children; we had none of our own." His point of view changes: we get the eyewitness first coming to a place, the man more familiar with it and better able to assess which report is likely to be reliable, the retrospective account by the man looking back over his two years there. In one story he compares two visits, a year apart, which he pays to a local writer, everything more or less the same each time but making a very different impression. The last story in the book is in the form of a letter written by the Consul as he is preparing to

[6] THE CONSUL'S FILE, by *Paul Theroux*. Houghton Mifflin. $8.95.

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go, addressed to an American friend who has gone back home, filling him in on things that have happened in the town since his departure, leaving the things that will happen after the Consul's own departure for another narrator to report on. As if to make us aware of the variations being played on different registers of the first-person address, the first person is dropped in one story where, without warning, we start by getting the private conversation between two divorced women exchanging notes about their former husbands. Paul Theroux's book is a virtuoso performance, so good that one wonders why in the end it doesn't amount to much more than an "entertainment," and hopes that this gifted young writer trying out his powers will find a subject which will truly engage them.

A volume of short stories and a volume of three short novels, the earliest and the most recent work by the Chilean writer José Donoso, have both come out in translation.[7] The short stories date from the fifties; we owe their translation now, I assume, to the attention Donoso gained with his last novel, *The Obscene Bird of Night*; but they are remarkable in their own right, aside from their interest as a background to his later work. Donoso feels that a Chilean, especially one like himself from the comfortable bourgeoisie, is the creature of a very structured world, a society shut in within its bounds just as the country is shut in between the Andes and the sea. The surrealist enterprise, its defiance and disruption of conventional society, has had for this Chilean writer, as for others from Latin America, a peculiar significance. In the hallucinatory *Obscene Bird of Night* we are outside that structured world, looking in on it with the outcasts, from the surreal perspective of all the dark forces it attempts to suppress. In an early story such as "The Walk," we are inside that world, with a comfortable family of three lawyer brothers living with an unwed sister who keeps their house in order; but then the prim sister unexpectedly takes in a stray dog which upsets the balance of the house; and after she goes out one night for a walk with the dog and never returns, we are, with the brothers, looking out the windows, afraid of what may be out there. In another story the little girl Ana María is an outsider seen from two different insides, the household of the parents who neglect her and that of an unhappy old couple on whom she has a strange effect; like the sister with the dog, the old man goes off with Ana María at the end. The monsters which emerge into full view in *The Obscene Bird* are already there in these short stories, lurking beneath their more realistic surface.

This suggestion of an unexpressed horror may remind one of another chronicler of bourgeois entrapment, Henry James, a writer Donoso admires. "The Beast in the Jungle," James's story about the man who awaits that fascinating dreadful thing which never comes, surely must have inspired Donoso's story "Santelices." Except that "Santelices" is the one of his short stories where the beasts are allowed to come out in the open: it is the story of an office clerk, an old bachelor leading a quiet and ordered life, who has secretly accumulated over the years a vast collection

[7] CHARLESTON AND OTHER STORIES, by *José Donoso*. Trans. from the Spanish by *Andrée Conrad*. Godine. $8.95. SACRED FAMILIES, by *José Donoso*. Trans. from the Spanish by *Andrée Conrad*. Knopf. $7.95.

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of pictures of wild cats in the jungle, poring over them at night alone in his room. When Santelices attempts to put some of his favorites up on the walls, the people in the boarding house where he lives object and the pictures are all taken away from him; the beasts then make another and more dangerous appearance in his mind. At the end of this story, significantly the last in this volume to be written, Santelices makes a leap out the window, from the structured inside to the wild outside which he has conjured up.

In his new collection of "three little bourgeois novels" (the original title, *Tres novelitas burguesas*, having somehow been rendered as *Sacred Families*) the Chilean writer, who has been living in Spain, deals with—to invoke Buñuel as the book jacket does—the "discreet charm" of the Barcelona bourgeoisie. The overt surrealism is not always an improvement over the suggestiveness of the early stories: "The Walk," for example, seems to me a better treatment of the disruption of an ordered household than "Green Atom Number Five," one of the three short novels in this new volume. "Green Atom Number Five" is the title of an abstract painting—or rather, as the wife in this novel says, "not abstract, Roberto, Informalist, it's different"—which the dentist husband, an amateur artist, regards as the best he has done. The couple has moved into their "definitive apartment," which they decorate with great care, the hanging of that painting in a certain spot constituting the finishing touch. As soon as it is hung, however, a stranger who may be the porter's brother comes and takes it away, the first of the couple's cherished possessions removed before their eyes as if by some conspiracy involving their friends, the maid, a moving company, four Seventh Day Adventists who take four Victorian glass paperweights—until the husband and wife end up screaming in a dark alley and ripping off each other's clothing. I found this funny and unsettling but also a rather familiar kind of surrealist attack on bourgeois possessiveness and pusillanimity.

In "Gaspard de la Nuit," on the other hand, themes foreshadowed in the short stories are developed into a tale of unusual richness and mastery. The title refers to a long and intricate piece by Ravel which an adolescent boy, named Mauricio like the composer, has learned to whistle perfectly. Like Santelices' wild beasts or like the "vocation for sleeping" of a character in another early Donoso story, Mauricio's whistling that Ravel piece is an escape into himself, away from the demands of others, the "violations" of himself Mauricio fears from a mother, a grandmother, a schoolmate, anyone who has with him "a relationship with a name." But whistling is also Mauricio's way of reaching out to others, strangers he encounters along his long walks, nameless persons he feels he can enter from a distance and force without their knowing it into the rhythm of the music. Mauricio is seeking out there a response to his music, from others who seem to move to it but then drift off, until one day he hears his whistling returned, imperfectly at first, from somewhere in a wood he goes to outside the city. The other whistler is an urchin—an outsider like the stray dog in "The Walk" or the little girl Ana María—a boy who looks exactly like Mauricio and to whom he transfers his music. They end up exchanging places, the other boy becoming the conventional adolescent Mauricio's mother wanted for a son, and Mauricio becoming finally a

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person without a name. In "Gaspard de la Nuit" the way in is also the way out, the wild beast in the mind also the stray dog in the streets.

Already some of Donoso's early stories, departing from the procedure advocated by his admired James, present more than a single point of view; in *The Obscene Bird of Night* we get a diversity of narrative voices which may all be a single narrator's but if so, one endowed with multiple consciousness. In "Gaspard de la Nuit" we start with Mauricio's mother, who listens to her strange son whistle in his room some music she can't recognize; then we shift to the point of view of the boy out on a walk, staying with him for a while before we get back to the mother; at the end we shift back and forth between Mauricio and the boy who has taken his place—an appropriate procedure in a short novel which deals with the way we look out at others and others look in on us. Another short novel in this volume, "Chattanooga Choo-Choo," is in the first person, the narrator a Barcelona doctor recounting his experience with a fashion model who, he discovers, is actually put together of detachable pieces like a window mannequin; but then the doctor himself is dismantled by his wife, and the narrative shifts to the third person, returning to the first the moment the doctor is put back together again, the "I" which starts to address us now coming, we feel, as if from a void. "Chattanooga Choo-Choo" is a brilliant and biting satire, with the doctor who starts out as the amused observer on the Barcelona smart set getting just what he deserves.

The title *Sacred Families* is not the only misrepresentation in Andrée Conrad's translation of these two volumes. In the original the doctor speculates on the "impossible possibility" that his wife would have an affair with the fashion model; this is turned into the "absolute impossibility" in the English version. The translator seems to have trouble with contradictions: elsewhere an "agreeable cold"—agreeable because it isn't too bad and keeps one from having to do anything—becomes the standard "disagreeable cold." In one of the short stories, "The Dane's Place," the entire last line is omitted, I suspect because the translator thought it unnecessary, but that story is built on the interplay between two different narrative voices, and Donoso's decision to conclude with "it was as if everything, even the most noble and beautiful, had been finished forever," rather than with "I never saw her drunk before," should have been respected. I also wonder why some of Donoso's collected short stories have not been translated, since they wouldn't have made much longer this slim volume.

Another translation from the Spanish is *The Fair*,[8] a novel first published in 1963 by the Mexican writer Juan José Arreola. Arreola's way with the Spanish language as it is spoken in Mexico, the vivid local flavor which is one of the chief strengths of this book about a town in Jalisco, posed a problem for the translator, who apologizes for resorting to footnotes and an appended glossary. These indeed impart an academic tone at odds with the playful informality of the original, but I found I needed to consult them while reading the original in my native language, and have to agree

[8] THE FAIR, by *Juan José Arreola*. Trans. from the Spanish by *John Upton*. University of Texas Press. $10.00

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they are unavoidable in an English rendering of this unique novel, as difficult to translate as a good poem and as richly compressed. Into a short space Arreola packs what amounts to a kind of epic of the fictional town of Zapotlán. *The Fair* is broken down into fragments, seldom longer than a page and often not much more than an exclamation ("Abundance, Hell! We are a town of starving people"), different stories interrupted and taken up again, different voices addressing the reader or one another. "This disorganized book" is how the jacket describes it in the Mexican edition, maintaining that such link as can be found among these diverse fragments is in "the tone in which they are told." But actually the tone varies a great deal, from the humorous to the apocalyptic, from the confession with the priest to the conversation in the public square, from the "I" of a private diary to that of an official letter, the "we" of the Indians to that of the members of the local Atheneum. Often it isn't clear who is speaking or who is being addressed; the speaker may give way to the document, the offhand utterance to the story handed down from the past, the oral to the written account. Bits of local gossip are intermixed with legends about the place; a shoemaker describes his misguided venture as a farmer while the Indians keep being put off in their claims to the land which had belonged to them; everyone seems to have something to say about a moneylender who drops dead, some story to tell about the whores who are run out of the center of town to a zone of tolerance, some horrible sin to confess after an earthquake which must have been a divine retribution; preparations are being made all along for the fair which concludes the book, a yearly celebration in honor of the town's patron, Saint Joseph, who occasionally has something to say himself. What links all this together, according to the jacket in the American edition, is that it all takes place in the same town.

What really provides the link, the unity in this diversity, is the web of cross-references among the different fragments, the kind of intricate dialogue which the different voices, whomever they may be addressing, seem to be conducting among themselves. The interruption of one voice by another is like a conversation where someone cuts in to add an observation, tell a different side of the story, change the subject, take issue with a statement. Here is an example of a legal document answered by a speaker in the next fragment:

> . . . The purchaser agrees that, in the unlikely event of a suit brought against one or all of the properties he is acquiring, he alone shall assume the costs and damages.
>
> * * *
>
> "The event was not unlikely at all. Since we couldn't accept the decision, we protested immediately; and, in fact, they said we were in the right—but we didn't get the land . . ."

The many actual conversations among the characters are enlarged into an exchange across the pages among things said and written about the town in different situations, as if all its inhabitants were engaged in a collective discussion of their various concerns, the pages of this book being for the people of Zapotlán a meeting ground unlike any actual place where they could gather. A gathering of voices is the form Arreola has given his book,

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allowing him to digress freely from any chain of events because the more important connection is among the things people have to say about all the events that matter to them. The conversation, the meeting face to face which among the people of such a town is a chief way of their getting to know what is going on around them, serves as a model for the impossible meeting which takes place on the pages of this book.

It may be intriguing to imagine Arreola's method applied to the subject matter of a new book which also attempts to come to terms with collective experience, *The Public Burning*,[9] Robert Coover's novel about the execution of the Rosenbergs. What would a gathering of American voices have said about the couple who were found guilty of spying for the Russians and sentenced to death for supposedly having stolen the secret of the atomic bomb? At one point in Coover's book a cab driver who had known Ethel Rosenberg describes the act she used to do as a stripper in the old days, but it turns out that this was the wrong woman. Aside from conjectures, what Americans in the fifties had to say about the Rosenberg case they were likely to have read in *Time* magazine, which appropriately Coover makes into the National Poet Laureate, quoting as lines of verse the peculiar *Time* prose of the time.

An impossible meeting also takes place in Coover's book, but this one is in Times Square, where he imagines the Rosenbergs to have been executed, on a stage where an exact replica has been built of the death house in Sing Sing, before a huge crowd which seems to include everyone in America. All who were involved in the case are up on the stage, as well as all the members of government who have come from Washington accompanied by their families, all up there together with Uncle Sam himself who is a character in the book and the organizer of the show, which he expects will teach a lesson to his enemy the Phantom. The "public burning" and the preparations for it are described by Coover in a shrill prose which is his version of the American public voice, a cross between the exclamatory and the folksy, between the comic book of Uncle Sam versus the Phantom and the newspaper report of events happening all over the world during the three days this book covers in June, 1953. Sheer excess is part of the satirical point, of course, but I think Coover overdoes his lists of assorted people or random facts, gives us too much of his intentionally tiresome Uncle Sam, lets such things go on too long as having all the Justices of the Supreme Court—all but Douglas and Black, the good guys—keep slipping on an enormous pile of dung left on the stage by the Republican elephant. In every other chapter, however, the public voice gives way to the private, a first-person account by Vice President Nixon of his experience and thoughts during those three days.

Having Richard Nixon for a narrator on the Rosenberg case reminded me at first of someone I know who likes to tell the children horror stories from the monster's point of view. But this Nixon is the public liar who privately admits the truth—his view of it, at any rate—who tries to get at the truth in this case where everyone, the Rosenbergs included, seems to have been lying, putting on a show. "I'd used much the same techniques

[9] THE PUBLIC BURNING, by *Robert Coover*. Viking. $12.95.

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myself," he says in reference to the play for sympathy he assumes the Rosenbergs are making by posing as fans of the Brooklyn Dodgers:

> . . . but what was wrong with the Rosenbergs' appeal was that it was obvious they didn't know the first thing about baseball, had no feel for the game at all. The Dodgers had won three pennants in the last six years and were a close second so far this year, and the only thing that excited the Rosenbergs was the fact that Brooklyn had broken the color barrier when they brought up Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella. As Ethel wrote, after allegedly "chewing her nails" over a boring 10-0 rout: "It is chiefly in their outstanding contribution to the eradication of racial prejudice that they have covered themselves with glory." Now, I ask you, what kind of baseball talk is that?

This Nixon also takes apart the prosecution's case against the Rosenbergs, imagining himself as the lawyer for their defense cross-examining a witness with questions which, had they been asked at the trial, would easily have exposed the rigged evidence. This is a much more endearing Nixon than the real one, a Nixon who puts himself in Julius Rosenberg's place at City College, where "ghetto Jews were *supposed* to be left-wingers . . . so in a way he was being just as conventional as I was back at Whittier College," a Nixon whose memories of boyhood on the farm in Yorba Linda, California, get mixed up to his surprise with images of the lower East Side where the Rosenbergs grew up, a Nixon who fantasizes his having been there one day back in the early years of the depression and rescuing the young Ethel Rosenberg from the blast of fire hoses breaking up a crowd of workers. I gather that some would have found it preferable if Coover had adopted the approach of a John Ehrlichman and named this character Richard Monckton. The "I" addressing us as Richard Nixon is indeed an impossible voice, belonging to someone at times recognizable as the Nixon we know and at times inconceivable, a character who couldn't be Richard Nixon and couldn't be anyone else—like the "I" of the reassembled doctor in Donoso, a voice coming out of nowhere. This seems to be what Coover is giving us as emblematic of the American private voice.

The fantasy of rescue from the fire hoses extends to an erotic fantasy, with the young Richard about to make love to the young Ethel in the apartment over her father's shop, the first time for both of them, when the Vice President masturbating in his office is interrupted by Uncle Sam. This is the day of the public burning, and the Vice President has been working long hours on the Rosenberg case, under pressure from Uncle Sam to come up with something special for the occasion. With nothing prepared as yet, a dejected Nixon takes the train for New York, but on arriving he has a sudden inspiration: "making the decision to meet a crisis," he changes trains for Sing Sing, hoping to steal the show at the last minute by inducing the atomic spies to confess before they are brought to Times Square. He feels he is in a unique position to reconcile the rural America of Eisenhower with the city of the Rosenbergs:

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> What was missing was the middle ingredient, the place in between where all the real motion took place now that the old frontier was gone: the suburbs, waystop for transients, and thus the true America. My America. Dwight Eisenhower and Julius Rosenberg would never understand each other, but I could understand—and contain—both. Was this to be my role? To urbanize the countryside and bring the wilderness back to the cities? To lead the New Revolution? To bring the suburb to all America?

Once inside the prison, however, Nixon finds that he is there not as a public but as a private man, a man whose true motive for coming had been to meet this woman, Ethel, he decides during his passionate encounter with her on the corriodor to the death house in Sing Sing. "Only in losing himself does [a man] find himself," he reflects, as Ethel ushers him into the execution chamber to hide him from the prison guards, which puts him, with his pants down, in the replica of that chamber on the stage in Times Square, the private moment turning into the public display. Outrageous as this is, it seems to me a fair comment on the American illusion of a privileged private realm, where we can be truly ourselves while elsewhere putting on a show. The public voice of America is the easier target, but Coover's satire strikes deeper with the private voice of this Richard Nixon taking us into his confidence.

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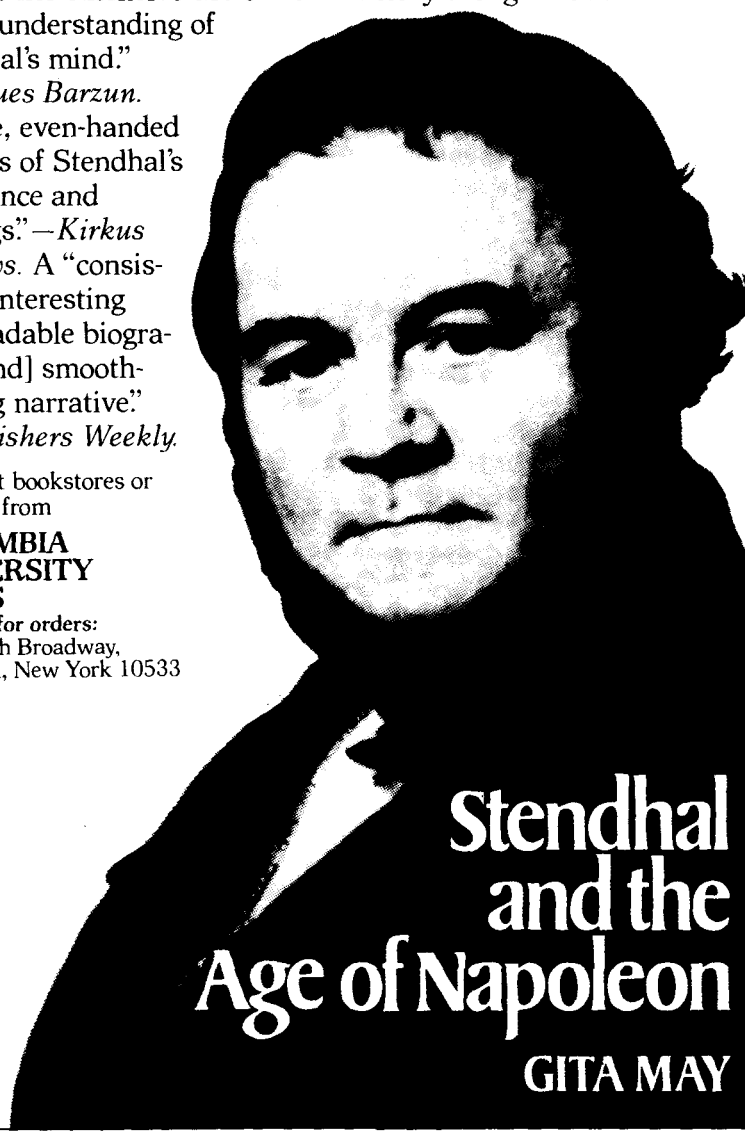

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